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SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 632. FOR WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 9TH, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

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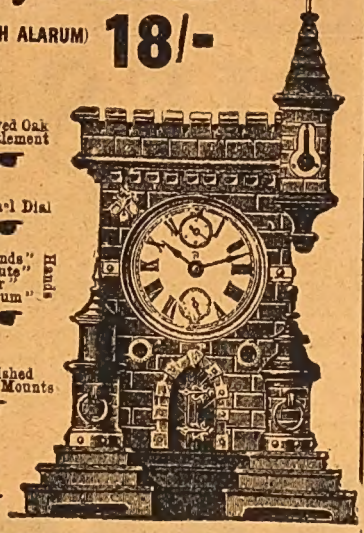

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SHORT STORIES.

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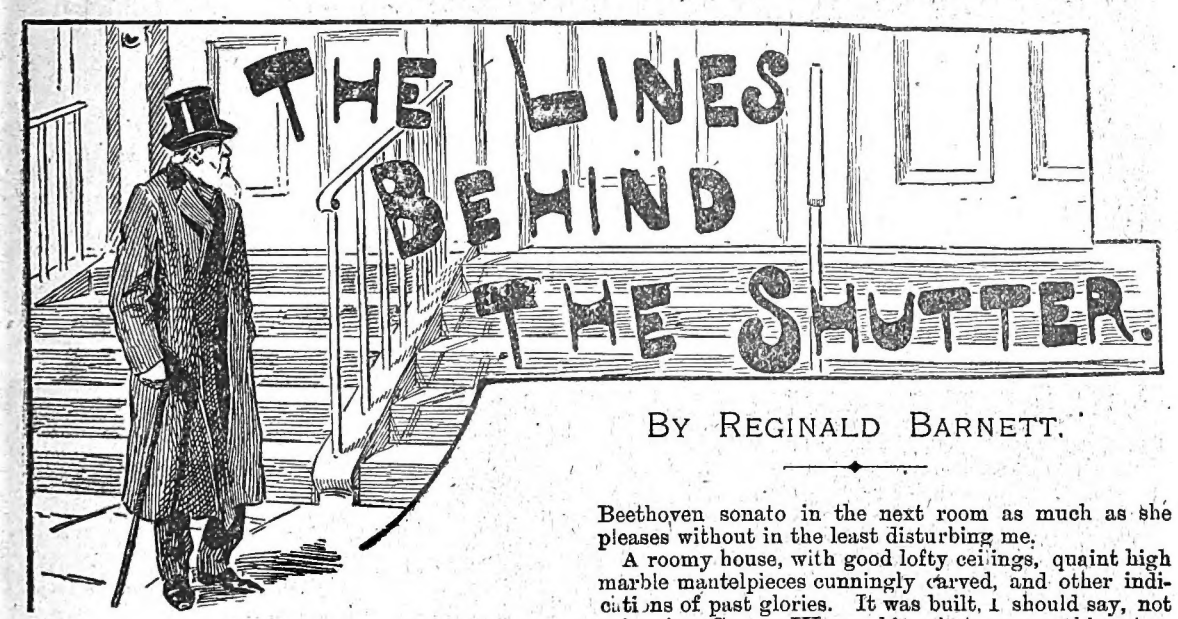

BY REGINALD BARNETT.

MOST houses have a story; I don't mean the architectural divisions designated by the word, but the narrative of some episode connected with inmates past or present. I know mine has, and though it deals neither with a crime nor with any accident of a thrilling sensational character, yet I think it worth the telling, and sit down to do so in a moment of leisure, with nothing of graver purpose to hinder me.

The house in question, occupied by me and mine, is situated in London. For obvious reasons I shall give no closer indications as to its exact position, but shall content myself with saying that I chose it some years ago on account of its vicinity to one of the Metropolitan Underground Railway stations, and the facilities which its site afforded for getting about comfortably and speedily from one end of the town to another. Being a business man, compelled by my commercial avocations to journey Citywards almost every day of my existence, I was naturally on the look out for such a convenient residence, and literally snapped at it when I heard it was vacant and to let.

I took it on a long lease and have ever since been able to linger at least ten minutes longer over my breakfast of a morning, a luxury which a man of my years and somewhat lethargic habit of body appreciates keenly, I assure you.

The building is an old one. No stucco, swiftly "run-up," enterprising jobbers speculation; but a good solid brick and mortar edifice, reared with care, and meant to endure.

A passing brewer's dray does not cause its stout walls to vibrate, and if I have any pressing work to do at home in the evening, my eldest daughter can stumble over a Beethoven sonato in the next room as much as she pleases without in the least disturbing me.

A roomy house, with good lofty ceilings, quaint high marble mantelpieces cunningly carved, and other indications of past glories. It was built, I should say, not only when George III. was king, but a young king too, and long before fashion had dreamed of migrating so far west as Belgravia. Goodness knows what lords and ladies held their refined jinks within its walls; what wits said good things over a pinch of snuff or a dish of tea; it is not of them I have to speak.

I am but a plain citizen, and it is enough for me that the house is a thoroughly comfortable one, suiting me and my pocket, and more than big enough to hold the whole posse of my five branches at such times when they all come home from school, and conspire together to remind of my responsibilities as a father.

The event I am going to relate happened some three or four years after I had settled myself cosily in my new abode.

I had returned one afternoon somewhat earlier than was my custom, for the purpose of celebrating my second boy's birthday, and sat at home in my easy chair like Goldsmith's good old Vicar, surrounded by my young hopefuls of both sexes.

Unlike him, however—owing to the din of romping and chatter—I entertained serious doubts as to whether I should not have been better off had I continued single and only talked of population, instead of marrying and endeavouring to bring up a large family.

Suddenly one of the children, who was at the window, attracted my attention by a remark.

"Oh, do look!" she said—it was Minnie, our youngest but one, who had not as yet overcome certain difficulties with regard to the pronouncing of her *r*'s—"do look at that old man in the steet! He's just like old Father Cwithmas, and keeps looking up here!"

"Where? where?" said the rest rushing to the window.

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I myself—as great a baby as any of them—glanced out, and, to be sure, the little thing was right. There was an old gentleman to be seen; a very old gentleman, with a long snow-white beard, who stooped very much, and steadied his feeble gait by the aid of a stick. A real Father Christmas; but by no means a shabby one, for the black clothes he wore seemed to be in excellent condition. My house appeared to be the object of his attention, and he looked at it, hesitated, and then looked at it again.

"He's coming to the door!" cried my little ones. "Father Christmas is coming to the door!"

"Coming to the door!" said I, "Good gracious, so he is! Who can he be, I wonder, and what can he want?"

He was too respectable and venerable for a tax-collecter; and the manner in which he approached the entrance of the house showed apparent timidity and diffidence. Surely he was making some mistake; I did not know him, and expected no srtange visitors.

He knocked at the door, and I just peeped out of the dining-room, where we were sitting, impelled by a certain curiosity to learn what his motive might be in singling us out.

"Does Mrs. Smith still live here?" he asked the housemaid, who ran up to him.

"Mrs. Smith, sir? No, there ain't no such party living here."

"Ah, gone, as I supposed," I heard the old gentleman say, as though speaking to himself. "It is many years ago."

There was a pause after this; and I could see that Mary, our girl, was doubtful as to what she should do next.

The old gentleman did not seem disposed to go, but stood at the door reflecting in silence.

"Can I see the present owner of the house?" he said at last.

"Here is my card; I should desire, if it is convenient, a few minutes' interview."

So there was no mistake, after all. Father Christmas had marked us for his own.

I looked at the card which the girl brought into me, and read: *Count Pogliano, Brescia.*

"Count Pogliano, Brescia!" I thought to myself. "That sounds Italian. What can a count want with me?" However, the movements of the old gentlemen had excited some interest in me, so I decided upon seeing him.

"Take him upstairs to the drawing-room," I said to the girl. "I will be with him directly."

I packed the children off to the nursery, and, having informed my wife of the strange visitor's appearance, hurried up to wait upon him.

He had taken a seat, but rose on my entering, and bowed with grave courtesy.

Face to face with him, I saw a man, who, when young, must have been strikingly handsome, and to whom age gave a singular distinguished and patriarchal appearance.

But for the stoop of his body, he would have been far above the average height of men; his nose was well cut and slightly aquiline, and his eyes had not lost their lustre. A truly venerable old gentleman, whom it was impossible to mistake for anything but a gentleman.

"Pray be seated, sir," I said, noticing that his great age—he looked over eighty—to a certainty made him rather feeble upon his legs.

He sat down again, and then glanced at me timidly, as though at a loss for suitable words with which to express his thoughts.

"I scarcely know how to explain my intrusion," he began at last, speaking with a slight foreign accent, but otherwise perfectly clearly, and employing well-chosen

"Oh, do look," she said. "Do look at that old man in the street!"

phrases. "My reasons for disturbing you will, no doubt, seem strange."

I nodded my head in silence, and waited for him to continue.

"The fact is—that I lived in this house many many years ago——"

"Indeed, sir," I put in, observing that the old gentleman was growing more than ever nervous and diffident.

"Yes, sir. A Mrs. Smith was the occupant at the time; but perhaps you have no knowledge of such a person?"

"No, sir, I cannot say I have," I replied. "My tenancy is quite of recent date—some three years and a half at most; and Smith was not the name of my predecessor."

"Ah, just so; thank you. It is many years ago; and things alter more than men. To me it seems as though it were yesterday."

He looked about him with a saddened gaze, and I could see that some of the recollections of his past moved him deeply.

"In what way can I serve you, sir?" I remarked, after a brief pause, desirous of bringing matters to some precise and business-like stage.

"That is exactly what puzzles me to explain," he

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answered, rousing himself from the half reverie into which he had fallen. The—the question is a delicate one—one purely of sentiment—I scarcely—I hardly venture upon broaching it."

But for his grave sad demeanour and the quiet courtesy of his manner, I should have been strongly disposed to consider my strange foreign noble visitor a lunatic who had by some means got astray from an asylum. Under the existing conditions, my perceptions led me to think that the old gentleman had some genuine and powerful motive for doing violence to his natural timidity, and boarding a Briton in his own castle.

"Well sir," I remarked, "you will of course, understand that unless you yourself chose to assist me a little, I——"

"Bear with me, sir," interrupted the old gentleman, meekly. "When you know all, you will not fail I hope, to excuse my trespass upon your good nature and patience. I am eighty-five years of age, and yet I have travelled all the way from Brescia for the sole purpose of visiting this house."

"Indeed, sir," I once more observed, at a loss for anything more original or fresh. "You have come a long way."

"Yes, it is a long journey for one so old as I am, is it not? But I could not make up my mind to die in peace without seeing the place once more."

Judging that this was all the old gentleman required, I gave him the opportunity of taking a good look round the room. To my disappointment, however, he seemed but little interested in the apartment where we were sitting, and continued fidgeting about uncomfortably.

"You will pardon my presumption," he said nervously, "but I am a little upset at finding the house changed into a private dwelling. It used not to be so in my time, but was let out into apartments to all comers."

"Really, sir!" I began, not a little astonished at this turn of the conversation.

"Do not misunderstand me," he resumed promptly, perceiving, no doubt, my look of amazement. "What I mean, sir, is that this alteration of circumstances makes the request I am desirous of putting extremely awkward and delicate. Had Mrs. Smith or any ordinary lodging-house keeper been here still, I should not have experienced such reticence."

"Pray do not distress yourself," I said, seeing that the old gentleman was in reality a good deal put out. "You need be under no very great ceremony with me. I am a plain man of business."

"Thank you," he replied, bowing with great courtesy. "Your extreme kindness gives me confidence. Well, then, you must know that my object in coming here was to visit the rooms which are just over our heads—particularly the one at the back, looking on to the garden. Do I express myself clearly?"

"Perfectly," I answered. "One of the rooms is occupied by myself and my wife; the other is my eldest daughter's bedroom."

"Ah!" he said—his face, which had suddenly grown almost joyful and animated for a second, falling considably at the latter part of my statement, "I was sure my request would be an awkward one, sir."

"Why, sir?" I asked. "Do I understand you mean that you wish to go up-stairs and see those two rooms?"

"Exactly," he exclaimed eagerly. "I—I was bold enough to hope that you would grant me the favour."

"Certainly, sir; nothing can be easier. Just one word to my wife, and I will return and show you to the rooms."

I rose and moved towards the door.

"One more question," he said, in an hesitating tone. "Have there—have there been great changes made in the house?"

"Changes, in what way, sir?"

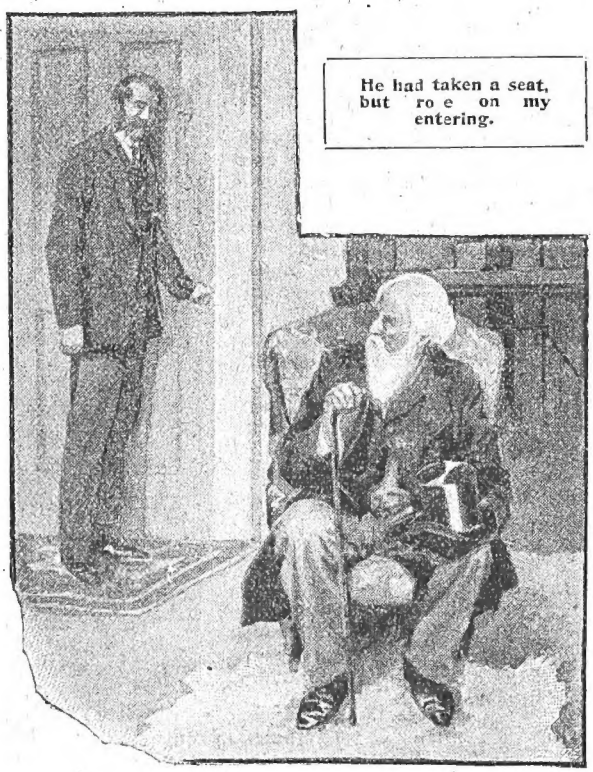
"Well—do you think the walls and—and the windows are much in the same state as they used to be years ago?"

"So far as I am able to say," I answered, puzzled and surprised at this odd query, "the house is pretty well what it must have been when it was first built. Of course, I need scarcely mention that the rooms have been painted, papered, and freshened up from time to time."

"Ah, you say they have been painted, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh dear, yes; I myself had the place done up from top to bottom before I came into it."

"Thank you," he answered regretfully, "thank you.



He had taken a seat, but rose on my entering.

My questions no doubt seem strange to you; but I had my reasons for asking. I was indulging in a hope which I fear is vain."

I then went downstairs, and explained to my wife in a few words the result of my interview with the old gentleman.

"Good gracious how extremely peculiar," she exclaimed. "And you don't mean to say, John, that you have been imprudent enough to leave him all alone in the drawing-room, with all my blue china and things lying about."

"Don't be alarmed, my dear," I answered, amused at her dismay.

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"I will be responsible for his honesty. The china is perfectly safe with him."

"Well then, he must be a lunatic," she replied, with a woman's logic. "Who ever heard of a sane man coming into a house, and making such a request?"

"I don't suppose he means any harm. He is very old and shaky, and has, no doubt, some sentimental reason for wishing to see the rooms. Surely there can be no objections to my gratifying his wish."

"But—I don't like the idea of strangers going up into the bedrooms. Besides, how am I to be sure that Carry's room is particularly tidy? it isn't as a rule, you know."

"Oh, he won't pay any attention to such trifles; and I can't out of common civility, refuse such a small thing to a man who has travelled such a distance."

"Well, if you must take him, take him," said my wife at last. "Only get rid of him as soon as you can. The tea things will be in presently; and the children will be troublesome if you keep them waiting."

Armed with my grey mare's grudgingly given consent, I rejoined the Count.

"Sir, I am entirely at your service," I said. "If you will please follow me up-stairs."

Visibly moved, the old gentleman rose in silence, bowed once more gravely as I opened the door for him, and walked up slowly, under my escort, to the rooms on the next landing.

At his own request, we entered my daughter's chamber. It was a pleasant room, looking to the north and on to the garden, or rather a succession of gardens; for the space at the back was an open one, and studded with fine trees of goodly growth, which in the summer, when in leaf, presented a charming green and rural aspect—quite a cheering and refreshing view not often to be obtained from houses situated in such a dense and central district as ours.

I glanced at the Count. The sight of the room caused so deep an emotion in him that I made haste to procure him a chair, lest he should fall.

He thanked me feebly.

"I daresay you were surprised," he said, "at the effect produced upon me; but you must know that, forty years ago, I lived in this very room. My poor Teresa—my wife, sir—was with me, and died here. Our son Carlo was born here. He is also no more; he died the death of a brave man at Solferino, while fighting for the land of his forefathers. I am alone now in my old age, and this is all that remains to me of the past."

"We were very poor," he resumed dreamily; "but we were young, full of hope, and rejoiced to have escaped a great danger. I had been compromised as an intimate friend of Count Confalonieri—you may have heard of the great Italian patriot, sir?—and I was about to be arrested. A companion warned me, and I succeeded in escaping from the Austrian bloodhounds. I fled to England, and my fond Teresa followed me here to this house, to this very room, and shared my lot. My land, my estates, were all confiscated. Though absent, I was sentenced to death as a traitor to my country, and I had to struggle for daily bread as a teacher of languages. But we were happy, in spite of our poverty. When I came home, Teresa was waiting with a smile to receive me. In the summer, however poor we might be, that window-sill was gay with flowers; and those gardens, sir—those gardens, sir, were her particular delight. She gave them the name of Bosco Bello. All the birds knew her, and came to her and helped her to sing songs to our little Carlo. They are both dead, and the room is a good deal changed; but the gardens, the trees, are here still.

He did not answer, and, falling upon his knees, began muttering to himself in Italian.

"All is over now!" continued the old gentleman, making an effort to control his feelings. "My title, my riches, have long since been restored to me; but what are they to me? One more request, sir; I know I have been most selfishly intruding upon your time and privacy, but grant me yet one more favour before I take my leave. May I look behind that shutter by the window?"

"That shutter!" said I, surprised.

"Yes," he replied. "It is sheer folly on my part, I know,

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after so many years have passed; but I still feel a mad hope in me to find something there that I remember well in the old days."

"Look, by all means," said I, a trifle suspicious that grief had preyed upon the old gentleman's mind, and that he was not perfectly sane.

He advanced, drew the folded shutter out with a trembling hand, and peered anxiously at the board or panel behind it.

"Look!" he exclaimed suddenly, with a kind of chok sob. "It is still there! *Gran Dio!* it is still there!"

"What is still there?" I asked, approaching him.

He did not answer, he seemed to forgot even my presence, and, falling upon his knees, began muttering to himself in Italian.

In a corner, blackened by the dirt and dust of time, but still fairly decipherable, was a faint scribble in pencil, and in a woman's hand.

"She wrote them two months before she died," said the old Count. "The verses are poor, but they mean more to me than the most beautiful lines of Petrarca. Her heart was in them. I am truly grateful to you for your courtesy and kindness. With your permission, I will now retire."

"Sir," said I with a great sense of sympathy and pity for the old gentleman, "if you ever desire at any time to come here again, pray stand upon no ceremony. I shall be only too pleased to welcome you."

I held out my hand, and he grasped it warmly.

"Thank you," he answered, "thank you. I hope to see you again—indeed, I have something more to ask of you; but not now, not now. I need rest, and have wearied you quite enough."

As I led him to the street-door, through the hall, two of my impish, mischievous little ones put out their curly heads, and, giggling to themselves, as children will, called out in shrill, audible voices:

"Father Cwithmas."

The old gentleman turned round, saw them, and smiled benevolently.

"Your little children, sir," he asked. "What did they say? Did I hear them call me Father Christmas?"

"Do not pay any attention to them," I said, frowning portentously. "They are exceedingly rude and ill-behaved."

"Nay, nay, sir," he replied. "Father Christmas is a good name."

He approached them as they came out timidly one by one, and patted them gently on their cheeks and heads, saying a few kindly words, after which he took his leave and disappeared, hobbling round the corner.

The next day a van drove up, and a vast package of elaborate toys of all sizes and description came to hand; and we knew the giver by means of a scrap of paper thrust into the parcel, on which the words, "From Father Christmas," were scrawled tremulously.

The good old Count must have ransacked and bought up the whole of a toy emporium, and my children were, of course, in ecstacies of delight.

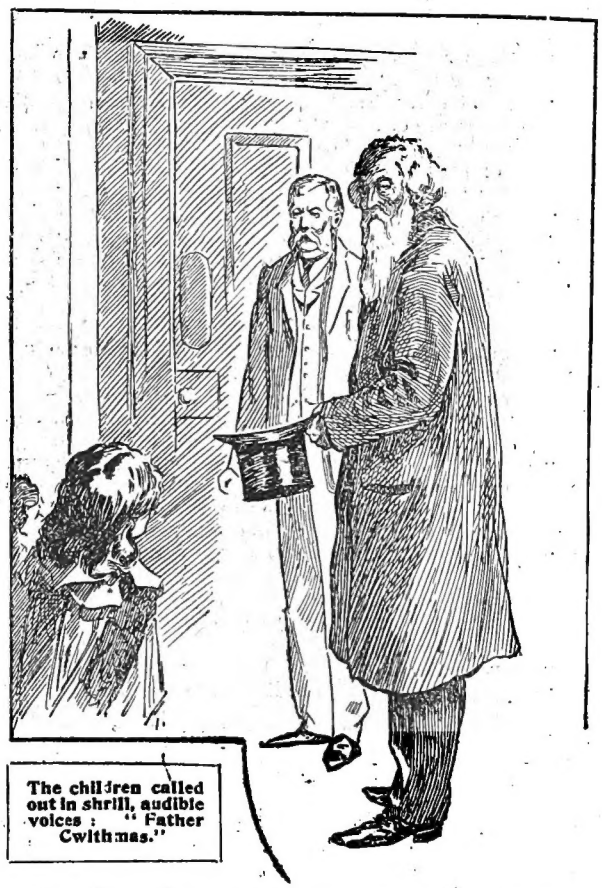
I saw him once again in the flesh. He drove up one evening—three days after his first visit—and, when our preliminary greetings were over, I sounded him as to his desire to see once more the room in which the happiest period of his life had been spent.

To my astonishment he declined to trouble me. His pilgrimage had been accomplished, and he proposed returning to Italy in two or three days; but he had come to beg one more favour of me.

"It is my wish, if possible, to take that shutter back with me," he said. "I should like to close my eyes reading Teresa's lines."

I promised that this wish of his should be acceded to, and he shook my hands warmly, and, as I think, invoked a blessing upon me and mine in Italian.

The dusty board, on which the faint lines were still preserved, was duly forwarded to Count Pogliano at his hotel. I myself never saw him again, but some two years after the event, when the incident of his visit was almost forgotten, a letter bearing an Italian post-mark came, informing me of the old gentleman's death, and advising me that, in accordance with certain instructions contained in his will, I should be in receipt of some tokens of his regard, which I was earnestly desired to accept. The said tokens reached me in due course: a marvellous piece of gold plate, the genuine workmanship of that cunning artificer, Benvenuto Cellini (to this day in my drawing-room, under a glass cover, and partly the admiration, partly the envy, of my friends); a host of curious and valuable trinkets—all family relics—for my wife and children; and a little beautifully-executed minature portrait of the Contessa Teresa Pogliano, which I was begged to hang up, for so long as I remained in the house, in the little room where she herself had lived happily, and died.



The children called out in shrill, audible voices: "Father Cwithmas."

There it is fixed at this moment, against the wall, and as near the window as possible; looking on to the old smoky trees, and greeting Bosco Bello with a serene peaceful smile.

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THE REAL THING.

OR, HIS LAST GAMBLE.

THE dainty drawing-room of a West End flat.

A pretty girl seated at a piano, softly rippling Tosti's "Return."

A warm blush still lingers upon her cheeks; her eyes are intently fixed on the sheet of music before her.

By her side stands a tall, well built man, upon whose features an expression of keen disappointment is plainly discernible.

"Then that is your decision, Miss Newcombe?"

"Yes."

"It is a serious matter to refuse."

"Marriage is more serious still."

"Granted. But I had thought you cared for me, and your decision comes upon me as a revelation."

"I had made up my mind never to marry."

"And I love you!"

"I am sorry—that is, you flatter me; but really, my duty to my father demands that I shall continue as I am."

"That is a noble sacrifice—for your father's sake. But do you think he shares——"

"Oh, pray don't mention that word, Mr. Hampton; that is the cause of all my trouble!"

"How so?"

"This horrid gambling on the Stock Exchange."

"Surely you don't——"

"Gamble? Certainly not! I see the folly of it."

"So do I. A friend of mine who thought he had discovered a royal road to wealth plunged a bit—had a flutter or two. But I—that is my friend burnt his fingers."

"Dear me! How painful."

"Ha, ha! You don't understand. He made several investments, on the advice of those who said they knew a lot about it. Instead of a rise in the prices coming off, they dropped and I—er—my friend lost every stiver."

"Ah, I understand. If your friend burnt his fingers, I'm afraid my father has cremated both his arms up to the elbow. Poor old dad. He is too credulous."

"What! Does the Admiral indulge in a flutter?"

"I am sorry to say yes; and the flutter invariably results in someone flying off with his money. The consequence is—I will be candid with you—he has lost every penny he possessed. We live on a small annuity, which he cannot touch, left me by my mother.

"Were he left alone, what would he do?

"That is why I have decided never to marry unless he can be reformed."

"But what reformation does he require? Without money, he cannot gamble on the Exchange."

"Ah! But he is such a slave to this terrible vice. You have no idea how the passion has gained the mastery over him. I fear—I dread to think about it, but I sometimes fear he will forget everything and sacrifice his honour and his name in getting the wherewithal to gratify his passion. It is terrible. My darling old dad."

Tears stand in the girl's eyes as she thus expresses herself. She goes on:

"How could I become the wife of any man who might be dragged into the mire by the act of a weak and infatuated relative?"

The voice of Hampton bears traces of emotion as he replied with some warmth:

"Under no circumstances could I regard your father with any feelings but those of a son. My love would be poor indeed if I allowed such fears to stand in my way! Mabel, I love you. Be my wife and make me the happiest of men."

"I cannot, I cannot consent."

"Is your rejection conditional? If I undertake to induce the Admiral to renounce for ever this weakness of his, may I hope—"

"I fear it is useless. If he would renounce it for anybody he would do it for me I know. But I have tried in vain."

"At any rate I shall endeavour to bring about that which you desire—the reformation of your father."

Again the tears flow into the big blue eyes of the distressed girl. She presses her lover's hands. He lifts one of hers to his lips and kisses it devoutly. So great is her emotion that, without a word, she hurries from the room.

Jack Hampton was not brought up in a very romantic school; he left Oxford to become a partner in his father's very flourishing firm of government contractors; and as he sits in an armchair alone in that pretty drawing-room, he is compelled to laugh quietly to himself at his self-adopted *rôle* of reformer.

"Is she only knew that I had been a bit warm on the same game myself; if it hadn't been for the hard headedness of my governor, where might I have been? Running a ranche; an undischarged bankrupt; anything bad, in fact. Happily the old man put on the brake at the proper time—and just saved me from ruin. It's a glorious life—the turf itself is quiet before it—on 'Change; full of excitement; a fortune in a day; ruin in an hour. It is a fascinating game indeed, and I have a big job before me to reform an old hand at the business—but here he comes."

Sundry sounds in the passage announce the advent of Admiral Newcombe, and he enters the drawing-room, slowly enough owing to his unwieldy size, which was designed on lines more suitable for a country mansion than for a bandbox flat in fashionable London. He greets the young contractor cordially.

Then, looking around carefully to make sure that they are alone, he asks in what he no doubt considers a whisper, but wasn't:

"How did you get on, my boy?"

"Badly, Admiral."

"Ha! How's that?"

"Miss Newcombe has rejected me."

"Too bad. But she's a keen judge of character, is Mabel."

"Mine is at fault, evidently."

"Poor fellow. But was her decision final?"

"Well, no; I may say there is hope if I succeed in a certain task."

"And that is?"

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"The reformation of an old reprobate."

"What? How extraordinary! An old reprobate, did you say?"

"Yes; a frightful old scorcher."

"Very extraordinary! Fancy making a missionary of you! Ha ha! Some of her poor pensioners in the slums, I suppose. Well, I wish you luck, but if he is the old rake your words imply, I'm doubtful of your success. These old sinners want a lot of reforming."

"And he is an awful old rake; but I shan't despair. I'll keep my eye on him in future."

"He'll want a lot of that my boy. But, pardon me, Hampton, my boy; have you seen the latest tape prices on 'Change."

"No, Admiral; my investments are not of the risky sort, I don't take very much interest in speculative groups. In fact, I don't approve of gambling on 'Change at all."

"H'm. I don't quite agree with you there, Hampton. Remember that most of our millionaires operated on 'Change."

"So did most of our bankrupts. Our millionaires control the movements as a rule. They wouldn't be millionaires if they didn't."

"Well, well; someone must take a little risk. Now, I have a really good thing on—thousands in it, my dear sir. I can put you on; but mind, on the strict Q.T. Do you ever have a flutter?"

"Not very often. In fact, it is some time ago, since I did anything in that line."

The Admiral again looks around the room with an air of caution. Bending forward he grasps Hampton by the arm, shaking it at every syllable, as, in a sort of fog-horn whisper, he utters these words:

"Put your last shilling into 'Blue Snakes' my boy, they are the real thing!"

Hampton begins to look interested.

"Why, Admiral, a week ago they were offered to me at ninepence each any quantity up to ten thousand."

The Admiral grins ecstatically.

"So they were; so they were; quite so; but look here," and he produces a *Financial Stunner* from his coat pocket, "what were the closing prices yesterday? Fifteen shillings and sixpence! Think of it—fifteen shillings and sixpence sterling! Now, here's a bit of news for you! To-morrow at this time they will be selling by thousands at par, or over £5!"

"Are you sure of this, Admiral?"

"Positive! Here is a wire from an old friend of mine in the City. 'Listen:

> "There is every possibility of The Big Crowds Amalgamated purchasing the 'Blue Snakes' to-day at the handsome price of £3,500,000 on the strength of a code cable received yesterday. 'Blue Snakes' are therefore a likely investment.—JACKSON."

"What can be plainer than that. At the price named, every single share should to-morrow be worth £5 each. It's a wonderful chance, and it would be flying in the face of Providence to neglect it. I am going to speculate my last farthing in it, and I advise you to do likewise. It's a dead cert. What's the correct time."

The Admiral is puce in the face from excitement as he pulls out his own watch to check Hampton's.

"Five minutes past three! I've wasted too much time talking."

"Hampton, do me a favour—a service—for which I shall be ever grateful! I can't get about owing to my lameness! Like a good fellow now! This is too precious a matter to confide to the telegraph or telephone service! I beg of you to take a hansom at once and rush for the Stock Exchange! Here's a bank draft for three hundred. Give it with this letter of instruction to Knowles the broker—confound him! he refused to give me credit last month, but no matter—he's the safest man I know. You will go? Right! Off with you!

"There's not a moment to be lost! Promise the cabby double fare to hurry. Now then! Don't lose a moment, my boy. The purchase must be made before four o'clock or all is lost! Hurry, Hampton, hurry! Come back to dinner!" And not permitting a word of protest or acquiescence

"Then that is your decision, Miss Newcombe?"

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to issue from Hampton's mouth, he pushes him to the door of the flat, which he opens, and almost shoves the bewildered contractor into the arms of the lift attendant.

"Hurry, Hampton! Hurry!"

Then the Admiral rushes back to his drawing-room the window of which commands a view of the street below.

"Hurrah! He's got a hansom," and the old man capers about the room in spite of his bad leg.

* * * * *

"Here's a telegram for you, father."

It is nearly two hours since Jack Hampton left the house on his important mission.

Mabel enters the little smoke-room of the flat, bearing in her fingers the usual unmistakeable envelope.

The Admiral, who had been trying to keep down his excitement, grabs the missive; tearing off the cover in a tremendous hurry.

"Ha! What's this? Good God!"

A terrible groan bursts from the white lips, and the old man totters back into his armchair paralysed in every limb.

Mabel, almost fainting with fright, rushes out for some water, and places the glass to the old man's lips. His features, drawn and ghastly, have the greyish shade of death.

The devoted daughter trembling in every limb, and as pale as the proverbial ghost, bathes her father's forehead. He gradually revives. His groaning is awful to hear. Suddenly he realises that it is Mabel who is tending him. He shudders. Then he makes a violent effort to be calm.

"Oh, what is the matter, father?"

"Nothing, nothing, my girl; just another little financial disappointment. I'm all right now."

His shaky hand stretched forth to grasp the cause of the scene. He repeats the message almost unconsciously:.

"'Blue Snakes' purchase declared off. Don't invest. Shares worthless.—JACKSON."

He sinks back again into his chair.

"What does it mean, dad?"

The old man burst out into a torrent of sobs and moans.

"Don't speak to me, dear, don't speak to me! I'm a mug!"

"A mug!" gasps the girl. She thinks he has gone mad, and fancies himself to be such a utensil. "Oh, father, don't think that you're a mug."

"I am—I tell you. And a stone-broke mug too," he groans.

"Tell me all, father."

"I will," the old man sobbed, choking with grief. "I'll make a clean breast of it. I've spent the last penny we had in the world in a mining speculation! Two hours ago I handed the money to Jack Hampton to go and purchase the shares. That wire now tells me that the shares are worthless."

"Jack Hampton did this! Oh father! What a deceitful man! He promised to cure you of this terrible passion—and now he aids and abets you in spending your last farthing. The cruel wretch!"

"It's my fault, my dear. I begged him to do it. I forced him to do it. Don't blame him. It's all the fault of your silly old father that everything we have in the world is lost and we are beggars!"

"Beggars; no father; no beggars. There is still my £300 annuity which is due on the 17th, why, that's to-day!" exclaims the girl, joyfully clapping her hands. "That will keep us for ever so long!"

The old man now breaks down completely, weeping like a child.

"Oh," he moans between his sobs, "my heart is broken. My girl, I have robbed you. I received the bank draft to-day, but my cursed foolish brain spun visions of multiplying it by six on the Exchange, and I resolved to use it for that purpose. Oh, forgive your wicked old father."

Mabel stands as though stunned by the revelation. Could it be possible that her father had been so unutterably infatuated as to thus bring them to poverty, temporarily at any rate? She is forced to admit it. It was what she had been fearing, that her father would stop at nothing to gratify his passion for gambling.

And Jack Hampton, in whom she had placed entire confidence had been, in spite of his solemn undertaking, a party to this cruel, crushing injustice. This man who had pleaded so hard to win her hand and heart, was almost guilty of robbing her.

Her belief in man's honour was rudely shattered. Yet she resolved to bear up under the bitter blows.

"Dad, dear," she whispers softly in the broken old man's ears, "don't fret any more. If only this will show you the folly of gambling, and be the means of saving you further trouble, I will regard it as a blessing. I will work for you, if necessary, and we shall be very happy together."

"Ah, never again; never again!" vehemently declares the old gentleman. "I have done with it for ever! Here, before you, my daughter, I solemnly promise never to gamble again!"

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"That is enough, dad dear; now see how happy we shall be together."

* * * * *

Mabel was not present when Jack Hampton returned to dine with the family; yet the Admiral's greeting was none the less hearty.

"The 'Blue snakes' have bitten me after all, Jack, my boy," he said, a little sadly.

"I thought their fangs looked a bit dangerous, sir," responded the contractor, without the slightest show of sympathy.

The old gentleman rather resented this.

"You don't appear in a hurry to offer your regrets for my loss," he remarked, a trifle peevishly.

"I am in too high spirits to care about regrets," said Hampton, airily. "When I went to the Stock Exchange on your mission I met an old friend of mine who knows more about shares than most people. He gave me the straight tip on a parcel of Kaffirs. I invested a couple of hundred and just before I started here I had a wire from my friend stating that I have landed a cool thousand over the deal."

"I congratulate you, Hampton. Still I think you might have spared a little sympathy for the losses of an old friend."

"What losses. I don't know any friend of mine who has lost anything."

"What!" the old man jumped up in sudden joy. "Didn't you buy those 'Blue Snakes' after all?"

"No, sir. My friend assured me that the reptiles were being rigged by a gang of bears, and declared that if you touched them with a forty foot pole you would be landed. So here's your draft."

"You don't—you can't be in earnest."

"I am."

The Admiral uttered a whoop of joy.

"Then I'm saved! Thank Heaven! You're a true friend, Jack; not to throw my money away recklessly! My heart is as light as air! You have saved—but hold on! Look here, how is it you didn't invest the money in those good things your friend put you on? Why, it would have meant a profit of—let me see—great Scott! £1,500. Think of it. Hampton, I'm extremely vexed with you. Why, good Heavens, it would have been a fortune for me! What induced you to drop me out of a good thing like that. Oh, it's a confounded shame, sir!"

Hampton was utterly astounded.

"How could I dare to risk another man's money without his authority? Why, it would have been absolutely dishonourable! Suppose the deal had turned out like the 'Snakes.' What should I have said to explain?"

"Oh, you wouldn't have had to explain anything but a jolly good turn of luck. As you *are* so confoundly scrupulous, why did you undertake the job at all, when you had promised my daughter to accomplish my reformation—the reformation of an reprobate, a regular old scorcher, a doddering old rake, and so on!"

Hampton looked very foolish and guilty; but he soon brightened up.

"Well, sir, that's a good reason why I didn't put your money on the good thing. That would hardly have reformed you—it would have encouraged you!"

"Well, I suppose I must forgive you. But I don't think I'm under any obligation to you."

Mabel had entered the room in time to hear the latter part of the conversation.

She came forward and said:

"Jack; if dad is not under an obligation to you, I am."

"Well," sighed the old gentleman, as he rustled the bank draft between his fingers, "at any rate it is better that this should have been saved. By the way, Jack; you must introduce me to that knowing friend of yours on 'Change. He might be able to put me on some other good thing—"

"Father; your promise," said Mabel reproachfully.

The Admiral sat down.

And Jack whispered:

"And yours, Mabel? Have you forgotten it?"

And she murmured:

"No, Jack, dear. I am yours."

"No, Jack, dear. I am yours."

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THE LION'S WARS

The British Legion in Spain.

(1835-1837.)

WHEN King Ferdinand of Spain died in 1835 his widow at once installed her daughter as Queen, contrary to the national Salic Law of Spain that no woman could wear the Spanish crown.

A few months later, Don Carlos, the brother of the deceased King, announced his claim to the Spanish throne, and his pretensions were at once acknowledged by the inhabitants of the northern Basque province. The result of this was civil war.

It is true that this very ancient Salic law had been set aside by the King shortly before his death, but as Ferdinand even in his prime had been little better than an idiot, and as its abrogation had not received the assent of the Cortes and the nation, Don Carlos declared that the throne belonged to him.

To us, to-day, Don Carlos seems to have had a good deal of justice on his side, but in 1835 Britain thought differently.

Whilst the Spanish Queen's soldiers were vainly endeavouring to subdue the agile, brave, hardy mountaineers, public opinion here had become so convinced that it was the duty of all Britain to see that the rights of the infant Queen should be upheld, that when the Queen Regent found that the southern Spaniard had no chance of overcoming his northern brother, she besought in tearful accents the aid of Spain's old and generous ally, Britain.

Needless to say the appeal was not made in vain, and here let us state in reply to the criticism of those who may be of opinion that the story of a British volunteer force fighting for a foreign power should not be included in the list of Britain's wars, that the enthusiasm roused by Spain's appeal for help was so great that on June 10, 1835, William IV. by the advice of his Privy Council, issued an order permitting any English subject to enrol himself in a British Legion for service in Spain for the term of two years.

But the support accorded by the government went still further, the newly-formed Legion was armed and fully accoutred from the Tower and was publicly recruited by the beat of the drum with the Union Jack flying. No time was lost in raising the force. Recruiting depôts being opened in each of the three kingdoms, the recruits were of course very representative. Starving peasants from Ireland, mill hands from Lancashire, City clerks, shop assistants, agricultural labourers, barristers, veterans of the Peninsular War, broken down swells, betting men, and members of many other trades and professions filled the ranks. The officers were all experienced soldiers, mostly on half-pay.

The commanding officer was Lieutenant-General Sir G. de Lacy Evans, a brave officer no doubt, but sadly lacking in the peculiar qualities required for carrying on a war in the northern mountains of Spain against the finest guerilla soldiers in the world.

Still he had earned such distinction in India in 1807 and 1810, had shown such conspicuous bravery against Ameer Khan and the Pindaris, and had earned in America such a name for Indian border fighting, that in the

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opinion of military experts no better selection could have been made.

The experts were all wrong as we shall presently see.

The legion landed at St. Sebastian, famous in the annals of our own wars for its siege, the fearless assault of our soldiers, and the subsequent looting of the town. The Carlists were in strong force in the neighbourhood of the town, but General Evans, although a daring man, was not a reckless officer.

He knew the value of discipline so before commencing operations he devoted an entire month to drilling his men. The Carlists were not in good s irits when the British Legion landed. Zumalacarregui, a guerilla chief of great repute and their best leader, had fallen at the siege of Bilboa. His death, therefore, whilst depressing his own side, had raised the confidence of the Christinos.

The desire of our men to try conclusions with the Carlists was so great that when their leader told them to wait till they had learned their drill they nearly mutinied.

When they had at length learned their drill they were ordered to be under arms on August 30, 1835, General Evans having resolved to attack a force of Carlists stationed at Hernani. After marching a few miles the Legion found itself at the foot of a hill held by the Carlists who to strengthen their position had run a line of intrenchments along the summit. The Spanish soldiers not relishing the presence of the Legion which they declared was an insult to their courage, charged the hill at the point of the bayonet. The Carlists being less than fifty strong took to flight, whilst the Spaniards well satisfied with their achievement, lay down to rest.

The consequence was that an easy chance of capturing Hernani was missed. The Carlists were quick to perceive the error. The Legion watching the distant hills for the appearance of the Spanish saw the Carlists rapidly descend the hill, cross the little bridge, and flock into the town. When our men, who were greatly puzzled, found the soldiers they had come to assist smoking tranquilly at the top of the hill, they had stormed an hour before, they waxed very wroth.

Being, as the historian puts it, "fond of nothing but fighting, they turned on their Spanish allies and thrashed them soundly with fists and musket butts."

Burning to retrieve their prestige and goaded by the jeers of the British, the Spaniards next day attacked the town with great fury. They were, however, pushed back with such resolution by the Carlists that a portion of the British Legion, 500 strong, was ordered to their assistance.

Although this was the first time the majority of the regiment had been under fire, they marched with unflinching steadiness across a huge field of Indian corn of a height so great that the red caps of the Chapelgorris—a corps composed of foreign mercenaries attached to the Legion—who preceded them looked like gigantic poppies and despite the murderous fire of the Carlists succeeded in reaching the shelter of a friendly dip in the land.

After a breathing spell they made a dash for the ridge of a neighbouring hill in order to divert the Carlists' attack on to themselves. With loud yells they reached the top, drove the defenders down, and then raced like deer up the steep brown rocks of the Santa Barbara.

The British soldier of those days wore stocks, tight fitting uniforms, heavy ill-made boots, whilst their head-gear was extremely large and fearfully heavy.

The Legion finding that tight belts, stocks, and big helmets, were unsuited for the mountains of Spain forgot their discipline and did the job in their shirt sleeves. The Carlists fought like lions, but they stood no chance with our men, who though they followed such unwarlike callings as shop-assistants, clerks, agricultural labourers and the like at home, fought as only Britons can fight.

The main body of the Legion were about following up their success when they saw that a company of the fourth (the Queen's) had been surrounded by a large force of the enemy. Dashing down the Santa Barbara they swarmed up the hill where the beleaguered company were battling against huge odds, pouring such a destructive fire into the flank of the Carlists that their comrades were able to escape. But the position of the hill enabled the Carlists to mass in such overwhelming force that the first Regiment had to fight its way out of what the enemies of the expeditions at home described as a well-planned ambuscade.

Towards the close of the day it must be confessed our men were in full retreat, the pursuit being so keen that at one time the Carlists got between us and St. Sebastian. But the bayonet pulled us through, our losses at the finish being half those of the Spanish. During the retreat, a sergeant and a grenadier of the first Regiment had been shot dead. Believing that the bodies would be sent in our men left them behind. That night the Carlists cut the bodies up and marched through the town of Hernani with the flesh of their foes stuck on the points of the bayonet.

As the Peace Party at home had been endowing the Carlists with every possible virtue, including a quite exceptional humanity in the conduct of war, one would have thought that they would have relinquished their cause. Political hatreds, however, are not easily allayed. The peace party got rid of the difficulty by declaring that the Legion had invented the charge in order to draw attention from their own cowardice and incapacity.

It was no good t e supporters of the war asking their opponents to wait till th Legion caught the enemy on a high road or an open field where the cavalry could get to work. The Legion wa so persistently ridiculed that although they had gone into winter quarters when the news arrived, they so clamoured to be led against the foe that General Evans had to begin a fresh campaign.

In the hopes of catching the Carlists napping, the greatest secrecy was obse.ved; a needless precaution, for the British quarters were so honeycombed with spies that our slightest movements were soon known in the mountains. Greatly therefore to the surprise and disgust of Gener l Evans the Carlists anticipated his plans by making a feint on the picket near Ametzagana hill a little to the left of the English centre. As soon as the greater part of the troops had been hurried off in the direction of Ametzagana hill the real attack was developed.

A large force of Carlists was hurled against the village and fort of Abza which commanded the important town of Pessages. Our soldiers were discussing their morning meal of wine and bread on the Ametzagana hill when an officer galloped furiously up.

The drums rattled, the bug ers dispersed among the hills to recall all wanderers. "Fall in!" "March!" Then came, "Quick march," and when another breathless messenger appeared, the ominous "Double quick" was ordered. Still another messenger, and before the return journey was completed every man was racing back at the top of his speed.

T eir presence was indeed urgently needed. The Carlists stealing up through an orchard had got quite

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Drawn by. *C. Lawson Wood.*

The Carlists got quite close to the village before their presence was discovered, and shot the sentries.

close to the village before their presence was discovered. They shot the sentries, cut the picket who came to their assistance, to pieces, drove back with great loss a small column which General Evans dispatched to hold them in check till the main body arrived, not forgetting to kill all the wounded. These formalities gave time for the troops to get back. The First Regiment was told to storm the church-yard, which they did after losing over a hundred of their men as they crossed a field.

A little diary of the war, now out of print, describes how a city clerk, on seeing one of the generals fall, seized his sword, mounted his horse, and, calling for followers dashed right into the centre of the Carlists. The courage he displayed was so great that a rush was made for his rescue. He was got out of the throng but not before he had cut down four and shot two of his adversaries. Still for all the gallantry displayed by the First Regiment, the Carlists captured the village.

Towards the close of the day General Evans made a desperate effort to effect its recovery. The ground was rough, woody, and so much intersected with thick hedges than that in the neighbourhood of the churchyard, that the night was well advanced before the Legion succeeded in dislodging the foe. According to the aforesaid diary our men to cheer each other kept repeating during the fight "what will they say at home of us now."

The night was well advanced when the contending forces reached the open. The fight then underwent a most surprising change. The Carlists knew how to use the bayonet but the men lacked the weight and nerve of the soldiers composing the Legion, and were now driven forcibly back with great loss. The Carlists as they retired on Aize set fire to the houses in order to deprive the Legion of shelter.

The smoke and the darkness was now so great that the troops fell into confusion, one of the regiments pouring several volleys into another before the mistake was discovered. This so enraged the men that when the Carlists reappeared headed by some priests holding their crucifixes aloft to encourage their followers, the Legion charged with such fury that priests and crucifixes both disappeared.

As the months rolled on the Carlists grew to so respect the dogged valour of our men as to prefer night attacks to day, in order to obtain some advantage, so they would assail us a couple of hours before daybreak. To recover a height commanding the town of Pessages a large force of Carlists one night crept silently towards our lines. But the sentinel saw them.

Waiting till they were quite close, the watcher fired a couple of guns, heavily charged with canister shot, and blew the whole force, dead, wounded, and living, down the hill side. Those who escaped uninjured met their death a little later when the Legion got in amongst them.

After this, the story of the British Legion in Spain enters on a new stage. Although the credit for the victories won rested mainly with the Legion, the Queen's Government issued a proclamation thanking her brave army, and especially the intrepid Spanish sentinel who had fired the gun in the night attack just recorded.

This mendacity filled the Legion with rage, and after this they never gave the Spaniards a chance. When the Carlists came in sight they would bear down on them like a red deluge and send them flying in all directions. Losses they thought nothing of as long as they could humiliate the Spaniards and annoy their enemies in London, but all enthusiasm for the cause had long since vanished.

Jealous of the fame the Legion were acquiring as hard fighters, the Government now starved the Commissariat to such an extent, that it was no uncommon thing for the troops to be without food for forty-eight hours. Then the officers, to suppress the growing discontent, tried to flog the men into submission.

They had defeated the enemy with great loss and had marched through St. Sebastian, which they had previously lost with flags flying, and bands playing.

The townspeople cheered, and the officers complimented the men. There had been hints as to a banquet, but the reception ended with the cheering. Great, therefore, was their disgust on reaching camp that night, to find there was nothing to eat. For a month after this a day hardly passed without some men after fighting from morning to night against their untiring foes being flogged.

One evening, in 1837, the Legion broke out into open mutiny. Some six of the officers, who had incurred much unpopularity amongst the men, were stripped in place of six soldiers they had ordered to have the lash, and but for the order that Hernani was to be assaulted without a moment's delay they would all have been flogged.

Forgetting their wrongs the Legion at once started for Hernani; great, therefore, was their chargin to find on their arrival that the Carlists had evacuated the town. In fact, they were so annoyed that they looted the shops. They were told to restore what they had taken and refused. You can shoot one man but not 5,000. General Evans saw this, so after persuading a few of the malcontents to go to Hernani and destroy the works, he set himself to win back the confidence and obedience of the Legion. But he never succeeded.

The force showed much of its old spirit on March 16th, 1837, when the *élite* of the Carlist army, 16,000 strong, attacked them. All the success they achieved was to force the Legion, which did not number 8,000 men, back about half a mile. The General was pleased, but it was London they were thinking of when fighting, and not the cause of the Queen Regent and her babe.

General Evans may have lacked the qualities of a great general, or even a guerilla chief, but in none of his battles did he lose either guns, equipage, or prisoners, whilst he took from the enemy 100 officers, 1,000 men, 30 pieces of artillery, and scores of entrenched positions. His men thought him a good officer but any regard they felt was quite overborne by the hatred they had conceived for the Spaniards, friend and foe alike.

Finding that they could not beat us in battle, the Carlists poisoned the wells, as certain of the baser sort among the Boers wanted to poison the rivers of the Transvaal with cyanide of potassium, and, with the connivance of the tradespeople, the food also, playing at night the part of assassins.

In April, 1837, they captured a party of 127 of our men and thirteen officers. Our fellows could have cut their way through but surrendered because they were sick of the war. The moment they gave up their arms they were brutally massacred.

In May, 1837, General Evans returned to England. Shortly after, Colonel O'Connell, with a new Legion of 1,393 men landed in Spain. But as, mainly owing to our exertions, the Carlist spirit was broken, the Spaniards took such little pains to conciliate the new-comers that they disbanded in disgust.

By July, 1837, both Legions had ceased to exist. A few returned to this country, but the majority were never heard of again.

[Next week: "Marlborough's Campaigns. 1702-1710."]

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

The Prize of One Guinea for the best Storyette has been won this week by Miss E. WOOD, 14 Marywell, Arbroath, N.B.

The Pound Weight.

In a village in Warwickshire a labourer went into the general store, which was kept by an old dame, and asked for "a pound o' bacon."

The old lady cut some rashers, and laid them on to the scale, but looked round in vain for the pound weight.

"Oh, never mind!" said the customer, obligingly willing to help. "My fist weighs just a pound. I'll lay it in the scale."

The shopkeeper confidingly accepted this offer, and sliced away at the bacon, merely remarking that "it seemed to take her a good while to cut a pound!" Needless to say, our hero got good weight.

A few days later he called again at the store, and, in a friendly way inquired:

"Found yer weight, missus?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "very soon after you had gone."

"Well, now, you see if my fist don't weigh a pound," said he.

The pound weight was accordingly put into one scale and the man's fist in the other, and of course the balance was perfect.

"Well, I never seed anything so near in all my life!" exclaimed the old lady in astonishment. "Here, lad, here's a red herring for yer honesty."

"Do it Again!"

They had been sitting side by side, he and she, on the back seat of a travelling circus. During the interval he slipped out to get a drink. She had not noticed his absence.

Presently an elephant, stabled in the rear, pushed his trunk through an opening in the canvas, and putting his trunk round her waist gave her a squeeze.

She did not scream, or even turn her head, she simply sighed and softly said:

"Do it again, George, do it again."

A Smart Ruse.

Mr. M., a well-to-do bachelor, after dining one evening with the officers of the infantry detachment, whose barracks lay about a mile from his house, invited two of them to dine with him on the following Friday.

But Mr. M. had a bad memory, and the invitation he had given passed from his mind.

On the said Friday, returning from his afternoon ride, he saw the two officers in front of him walking towards his house.

Mr. M. at once recollected the invitation, and at the same moment became painfully conscious that he had told his housekeeper he would only require a couple of chops for dinner.

After a brief moment of despair Mr. M. cantered on, and overtaking his friends a few yards from his own gate he accosted them hurriedly:

"Good evening. Out for a stroll, I suppose. Don't forget that you dine with me this day week."

Then he cantered off, but that day week the two officers dined off the best of everything.

Once Bitten——

I was cycling along a country road at an easy pace when a tramp pretended to have been knocked down by me as I passed. Getting up again with an assumption of great physical suffering he demanded pecuniary compensation.

I was so indignant at the clumsy attempt to knock money out of me that I seized him and thumped him, shook him, kicked him, and finally flung him into a brook by the roadside.

He scrambled out and scurried away as fast as his aching limbs would let him.

An intensely amusing sequel happened a week later, when I really did accidently knock this same tramp down. Jumping off my machine I put it against the edge and ran back to apologise, but the man took to his heels, although I ran some distance after him, being really anxious to know whether I had hurt him, and ready—on this occasion—to give him monetary recompense.

But he must have thought that I believed that he had again only shammed being run over, and that I was bent on giving him another thrashing, for he ran like the wind.

The Boar.

Two Irishmen, finding themselves dead broke at the Christmas season, consulted each other as to how they could raise some funds for their holiday. They thought of plan after plan, till at last one of them suggested that they should raffle a pig. Accordingly, a form was drawn up as follows:

"To be raffled, on Christmas Eve, a fine Yorkshire boar, recently imported into the country. Sacrificed for ten chances at half-a-crown each. The list was taken round the village, and in a short time all the chances were sold. Soon, however, the dread 24th came and the men had to face the uncomfortable reality that it was the day of the raffle. Looking over the list, they selected the subscriber whom they believed to be the best-natured of the lot, and wrote to him as follows:

"Dear Sir,—We are happy to inform you that the raffle of the Yorkshire boar was held to-day, and that you are the fortunate winner. We hold the animal at your disposal, and shall be pleased to forward it as soon as you are prepared."

Early next morning, however, before the fortunate winner had fully realised his good luck, he was greeted with the following letter:

"Dear Sir,—We regret to inform you that the Yorkshire boar died at twelve o'clock last night. We do not know the exact cause of death; but, judging from the symptoms, we believe it to be either cholera or influenza. Owing to the existing sanitary regulations, the animal had to be buried without delay. We shall be glad to receive your cheque for ten shillings and sixpence, being the amount of funeral expenses incurred."

The fortunate winner did not remit the amount, but he thought it safe not to make any further inquiry about the pig.

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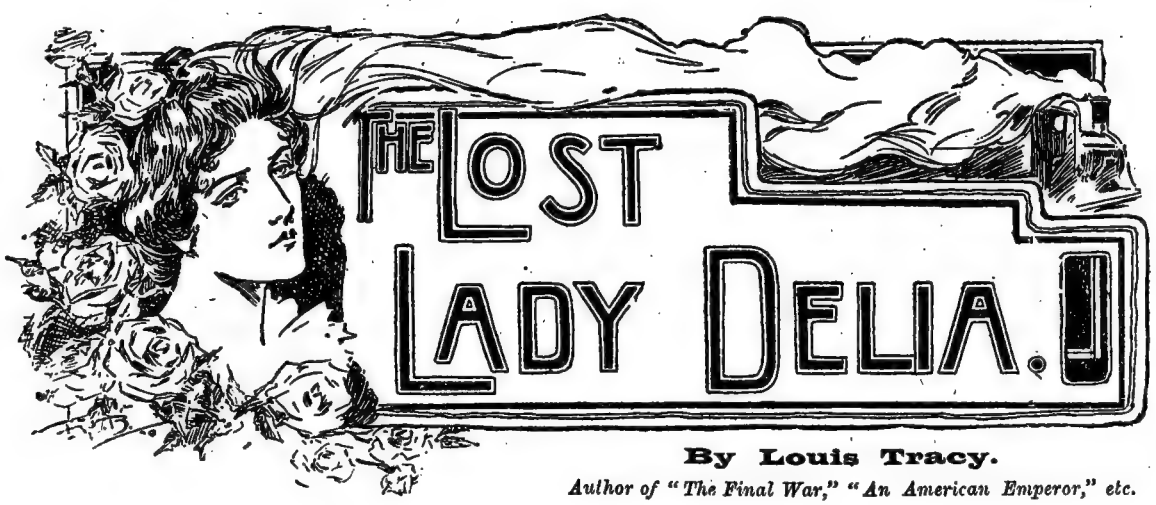

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

THIS TELLS THE STORY FROM THE START.

LADY DELIA LYLE leaves her house one foggy November afternoon, saying she is going to see her sister at Richmond, but from that time she is not heard of.

Her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of the Lyles, also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears. She is afterwards found to have gone on the stage.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hillmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister.

It had transpired that Pyne had gone to Monte Carlo, and thither Brett goes, and he discovers that though letters are addressed to Pyne at the Hotel du Cercle he is not known there.

During his stay at Monte Carlo Brett becomes acquainted with an Englishman, named Albert Mensmore, whom he helps out of some money difficulties, but he does not discover anything about Pyne.

After his return Brett finds out that Sir Charles Lyle knows Albert Mensmore, but in what connection does not transpire.

A few days later Brett goes into the City, to the office of Dodge and Co., with whom he had had some speculative dealings, and from remarks made by Mr. Dodge, he thinks that Pyne and Mensmore must be one and the same man. In the evening Brett and Winter go to Raleigh Mansions and search the flat occupied by Pyne. Brett finds that a piece of one of the fire-dogs is missing, and that it exactly corresponds with the piece of iron which was found imbedded in the head of the body found at Putney.

He again visits Mrs. Hillmer, who is terrified by his inquiries, and this seems to strengthen suspicion against her brother.

CHAPTER XVII.

A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION.

BRETT had now several lines of inquiry open.

Apart from the main and vital question as to the exact method of Lady Delia's death, and the identity of the person responsible for it, a number of important matters required attention.

Why had Jane Harding quitted her situation so suddenly?

Whence did she obtain the money that enabled her to blossom forth as Marie le Marchant?

Who was Sydney H. Pyne?

Why did Mensmore adopt a false name; and, in any case, why adopt the name of Pyne?

Why did Mrs. Hillmer exhibit such sudden terror lest her brother might be guilty?

Whom did Mrs. Hillmer marry? Was her husband alive or dead?

Was the man who conveyed Lady Delia's body from Raleigh Mansions to Putney responsible also for her death?

Finally, why did he select that particular portion of the Thames banks for the bestowal of his terrible burthen?

Many other minor features suggested themselves for careful attention, but the barrister knew that if he elucidated some of the major questions the rest would answer themselves.

The last query promised to yield a good crop of information should it be satisfactorily dealt with. Turning to his notes he found that the former owner of the Putney house was a tutor or preparatory schoolmaster, named the Rev. Septimus Childe.

Could it be that this was the school in which both Sir Charles Lyle and Mensmore were fellow-students? If so, Brett failed to see why he should not forthwith place the whole of the facts in his possession at the service of the police, and allow the law to take its course.

On this supposition the case against Mensmore was very black; not, indeed, incapable of explanation—for circumstantial evidence occasionally plays strange pranks with logic—but of such a grave nature that no private individual would be justified in keeping his knowledge to himself.

Somehow, the deduction was disagreeable; Brett resolved to coerce his thoughts, and do that which was right, irrespective of consequences.

He did not possess a Clergy List, but could get one at his club. No letter came from Mrs. Hillmer, so he walked across the Park to Pall Mall to consult the appropriately-bound black and white volume, which gives reference to the many degrees of the Church of England.

Septimus Childe was a distinctive, though simple, name. But it was not there. There was not a Childe with a final "e" in the whole book. Without that important letter, as Brett's informant might be mistaken, there were several. Close scrutiny of each man's designation and duties convinced Brett that, though any of these might be one of the particular Child's children, none answered to the description of the gentlemen he sought.

Of course, he could always apply to Sir Charles Lyle, but he dreaded approaching the grief-stricken baronet on this matter. Now there was no help for it. The barrister was beginning to feel impatient at the constant difficulties which barred progress in each direction. After all, it was a small thing merely to ask his friend if he ever knew a reverend gentleman named Childe.

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Brett was sure that Sir Charles could not be acquainted with Mr. Childe, and also with the fact that the Putney house had served as his school, for it would be strange beyond credence if it were so that he had not mentioned it.

The weather was still clear and cold, and a wintry sun made walking pleasant. Brett, on quitting his club, set out again on foot. He crossed St. James's Square, Jermyn Street, and Piccadilly, and made his way to Oxford Street up New Bond Street.

Not often did he frequent these fashionable thoroughfares, and he had an excellent reason. When walking, he was given to abstraction, and seldom saw his acquaintances if he encountered them in unusual quarters. He would thus cut dead a woman at whose house he had dined the previous evening, or, when he was in practice at the Bar, fail to notice the salutation of his own leader.

To Reggie himself this shortcoming was intolerable; consciousness of it when in the West made him the most alert man in the crowd to note anybody whom he knew, except on the rare occasions when he forgot his failing.

This morning Bond Street was pleasantly full. People were beginning to return to town, as Parliament met in a few days, and Brett passed many who were on his visiting list.

Outside a well-known costumier's he saw a brougham, into which a lady had just been helped by the commissionaire.

It is no uncommon thing to recognise an acquaintance by the colour of his horse or the peculiar cut of his coachman's whiskers. This time Brett knew the driver as well as the equipage, but the lady inside was not Mrs. Hillmer.

Instantly he was at the door, with his hat lifted; he assumed an expression of polite regret as he saw Dobson, the maid, in her mistress's place.

"Sorry," he said. "I knew the carriage, and thought that Mrs. Hillmer was inside. She is well, I trust."

"Not very, sir," answered the maid with an angry pout.

"Indeed, what is the matter?"

"Madame is going away, and has put us all on board wages."

Dobson had some of the privileges of a companion, and resented this relegation to the servants' hall.

"Going away?" cried Brett. "A sudden decision, eh?"

The girl was arranging some parcels on the shelf in front of her. She was not disinclined for a conversation with this good-looking gentleman, so she smiled archly as she said: "Didn't you know, sir? I thought you would know all about it."

What he might have ascertained by a longer chat the barrister could not tell, for an interruption occurred. The coachman, more loyal to his mistress than the maid, said:

"Beg pardon, sir, but the missus told us to hurry;" and he whipped up his steed, to mingle with the passing stream of carriages.

"More complications," murmured Brett. "Mrs. Hillmer contemplates a bolt. Shall I pay her another visit and surprise her? No, confound it, I will not. Let her go, and let things take their course."

Not in the most amiable frame of mind at this discovery, he pursued his walk to Portman-square.

Sir Charles Lyle was at home. He always was, now.

"For goodness' sake, Mr. Brett," whispered Thompson, in the hall, "get Sir Charles to quit smokin', and readin', and thinkin'. He sits all day in the library and hardly has anythink to eat."

Reggie reproached himself for having neglected his resolution to stir his friend into something like animation. He was wondering what he should do in the matter, when the baronet rose at his entrance, saying, with a weary smile:

"Well, Brett, what news?"

The other suddenly decided to throw all questioning to the winds for the moment. "I have come," he cried, "to bring you out. I won't hear of a refusal. Let us walk to the club and have lunch and a game of billiards."

Sir Charles protested. He had slept badly and was tired.

"All the more reason that you should sleep well to-night. Come, now, be advised. You will allow yourself to become a hopeless invalid if you go on in this way."

Lyle unwillingly consented, and they left the house. The older man brightened up considerably amidst the bustle of the streets. His colour returned, he talked with some degree of cheerfulness, and even laughed as he said to Brett: "I never understood you were a doctor, Reggie, in addition to your other varied acquirements. For the first time since—since November last, I feel hungry."

"Why don't you take my advice, and go away for some shooting? It is not too late, even now, to go after a hare."

"I will think of it. I wonder who we shall meet at the club."

"Lots of fellows, no doubt. And, by the way, you must be prepared for one little difficulty. Suppose they ask for Lady Delia!"

The baronet's momentary gaiety vanished. He stopped short, and clutched Brett's arm. "Don't you see," he almost moaned, "that this is the reason I have kept indoors for so long? What shall I say?"

"You must make the best of it. Say, off-handedly, you don't know where she is—either with relations or in Italy. Anything will do, and it will create a false impression."

"I am sick of false impressions. I cannot do it."

"You must."

The stronger will prevailed, and they entered the doors of the Imperial, where, of course, Lyle was hailed at once by a dozen men.

"Hallo, Charlie! Been seedy?"

"Good gracious, Lyle! have you had influenza? I've missed you for months, now I come to think of it."

"I haven't seen your wife for quite a time. How is she?"

In the multitude of questions there was safety.

Sir Charles answered vaguely, and a chance arrival created a diversion by announcing that Royal Message had again broken down in his preparation for the Grand National.

Later in the afternoon the two found themselves ensconced in a quiet corner of the smoking-room. Brett seized the opportunity to get quickly over the interrogation.

"You told me," he said, "that Mensmore and you were at school together?"

"Did I?" said the baronet.

"Yes; don't you remember?"

"I get mixed up in thinking about things. But it is all right. We were"

"Whereabouts?"

"Oh, a private establishment kept by an old chap called Septimus Childe—Lucky Number was our nickname for him."

Brett betrayed no surprise at this startlingly simple statement. He said casually:

"I mean where was the school situated?"

"At Brighton in my time. But afterwards he shifted to some place nearer London—something to do with examinations, I fancy."

"But don't you know where?"

"How should I? I was at Sandhurst then. I believe the old boy is dead. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, it has something to do with the inquiry. I won't trouble you now with the details."

"Go on, I can stand it."

"But where is the good in paining you needlessly?"

"That stage has passed, old chap. My wife's memory has almost become a dream to me."

"Well, it is an extraordinary thing, but that place where

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—that house at Putney, you know, must have been the new school of the Rev. Septimus Childe."

"How did you learn that?"

"I have known it for months, ever since the inquest."

"And you did not tell me?"

"True, but at the time it seemed of no consequence. Now that Mensmore turns out to be a pupil of his, and probably passed the remainder of his early school days at that very establishment, the incident assumes a degree of importance."

Sir Charles looked earnestly at Brett as he put his next question: "Tell me, Reggie, do you seriously believe that Mensmore had anything to do with my wife's death?"

"I cannot honestly give you a satisfactory answer."

"But what do you think?"

"If you press me I will try to put my opinion into words. Mensmore was in some mysterious way associated with the crime; but the degree of association, and whether conscious or unconscious, I do not know."

"What do you mean by 'conscious or unconscious?'"

"I am sure that Lady Delia met her death in his residence; but it is impossible to say now if he was aware of her presence. He was in London at the time, that is quite certain."

"Do the police know all this?"

"No."

"I am glad of it. Mensmore did not kill my wife. The suggestion is absurd—wildly absurd."

"Things look black against him, nevertheless."

"I tell you it is nonsense. You are on the wrong track, Brett. What possible reason could he have to decoy my wife to his flat and there murder her?"

"None—perhaps."

"Then why do you hesitate to agree with me?"

"Because there is a woman in the case."

"Another woman?"

"Yes; Mensmore's sister, or half-sister, to be exact. She also lives in Raleigh Mansions."

"Indeed. So all kinds of things have been going on without my knowledge. Yet you promised faithfully to keep me informed of every incident that transpired."

"I am sorry Lyle; but you were so upset——"

"Upset, man. Don't you realise that this affair is all I have to think about in this world?"

The baronet was so disturbed that Reggie at once made up his mind to tell him as little as possible in the future. These constant possibilities of rupture between them must be avoided at all hazard.

To change the conversation he said: "Never mind, Lyle; this time you must pardon my inadvertence. How do Lady Delia's people bear the continued mystery of her disappearance?"

"At first they were awfully cut up. But lately they have been reconciled to her death, which they say must have resulted from accident, and that her identity must have been mixed up with that of some other person. Such things do happen, you know. Anyway, her sister has gone into mourning for her. You didn't know, I suppose, that I have made my little nephew my heir?"

"Was that step necessary at your time of life?"

"I shall never marry again, Brett."

"Well, let us drop the subject. You have done right as regards the boy under present circumstances; but, as a man of the world, I only point out that it is an unwise thing to bring up a youngster in expectation of something which chance might determine differently."

"Chance! There is no chance! My wife cannot return from the grave!"

"True. You have done right, no doubt. But the suddenness of the thing caused me to speak unwittingly."

They were silent a little while, when Sir Charles returned to the subject nearest his heart.

"Has your search developed in other directions?"

Brett fenced with the query. "To be candid," he said, "I am now most busily engaged in the not very difficult task of throwing dust in the eyes of the police. My motives are hardly definite to myself, but I do not want this unfortunate man, Mensmore, to be arrested until I have personally become convinced of his guilt."

"You are right, Brett. Your instinct seldom fails you. I question if he ever, to his own knowledge, saw my wife."

"Ah! You see you have hit upon my difficulty. Show me Lady Delia's reason for making that secret journey, and I will tell you how she met her death."

His concluding words sank to a murmur. An old friend of Lyle's had entered the room and came towards them.

A few minutes later Brett quitted the Imperial and drove to his chambers, where he found a note from the ticket-collector stating that Foxey's name was William Marsh.

The day was still young, and the barrister paid a visit to the West London Police Court, where the records soon revealed the conviction of the cab-driver and the period of his sentence.

"Let me see," said the resident inspector, "his time at Holloway is up on February 6th. That is a Monday, and as Sunday doesn't count, he will be liberated on the 4th, about 8 a.m. That is the habit, sir, in the matter of short sentences. If you want to see him when he leaves the gaol you can either wait at the gates or at the nearest public-house where the prisoners go for their first drink. They seldom or never miss."

Brett thanked the official and returned home.

He was on the point of going out to drive, when he received a letter from Sir Charles Lyle. It ran:

My dear Reggie,—To-day's experiences have impelled me to take this inevitable step of announcing my wife's death. Hence I have forwarded the inclosed notice to an advertisement agency, with instructions to insert it in the principal papers. I have also decided to follow your advice and leave town for a few days. I am going to Wensley, my place in Yorkshire, should you happen to want me.—Yours, Charles Lyle.

The notice read:

Lyle.—On November 6, Delia, wife of Sir Charles Lyle, suddenly, at London.

Next morning it figured in the obituary columns of many newspapers, as Brett, though taken aback by the rapidity of his friend's action, saw no reason to endeavour to stop him. In the words of the letter, it was "the inevitable step."

CHAPTER XVIII.

What Happened on the Riviera.

The *White Heather* swung quietly at her moorings in the harbour of Genoa the Superb. The lively company on board, tired with its day's sightseeing, had left the marble streets and palace cafés to the Genoese and sought the pleasant seclusion of the yacht's airy promenade deck.

"Dinner on board, followed by a dance," said Phyllis, as arbiter of the procedure. A few hasty invitations sent out to British residents in Genoa had met with general acceptance, and the lull between afternoon tea and the more formal meal was gratefully accepted by the hosts.

Genoa is so shut in by its amphitheatre of hills that unless a gale blows from the west, its bay is unruffled and its atmosphere oppressively hot during the day, even in the winter months.

Sir William Browne's excursion had proved so attractive to those invited that the *White Heather* was taken further along the coast than had been originally intended When all the best known resorts of the Riviera proper were exploited, some one, probably prompted thereto by Phyllis or Mensmore, suggested a run to Genoa.

They had been here three days, and on the morrow would hand the yacht over to the owner's agents, whilst those on board separated once more on their different routes. The Brownes went to Florence and Rome, and Mensmore was pretending to hold out against the pressing request to

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accompany them, given cordially to him by his prospective father-in-law.

This afternoon Phyllis and he were leaning over the taff-rail and discussing the point.

The young lady was slightly inclined to be angry. Her eyes roamed over the magnificent panorama of church-crowned hills and valleys of luxurious green, with the white city in front and the picturesque quays looking as though they had been specially decked for a painting by Clara Montalba. But Phyllis paid heed to none of these things. She wanted her lover to come with her and not to fly to smoke-covered London.

"Business!" she cried "it is always business that men think of. Of course I know that affairs need to be attended to, but now that everything is settled and we are quite happy, it is too bad of you to run away immediately."

"But, dearest——"

"There now, take your hand off my arm. You are not going to coax me into agreement. Just because you receive a horrid letter this morning you go and upset all the arrangements."

"Phyllis, listen to me. I——."

"You *shan't* go. I think it is mean of you to insist upon it when I am so urgent."

"I am not insisting. You might at least help me to settle matters; otherwise they will get terribly mixed."

"And you *will* stay?"

"What else can I do when you ask me?"

"Oh, you darling!"

This little quarrel was very delightful, and made them feel ever so much more in love than before; but it did not help Mensmore out of his difficulty.

"Let us see what Pyne really says," he remarked, ruefully taking a letter from his pocket.

"Am I to look too?"

"Of course. I have no secrets from you, little woman."

Phyllis nestled up close to him. This time she did not object to his hand resting on her shoulder, and together they read the following letter:—

"My Dear Bertie,—At last I am able to write to you definitely. The prospectors have struck it rich on our property, and I have sold two claims outright for 50,000 dollars. With this nest egg I am taking the girls to New York, and shall then start by the *Teutonic* for your side of the pond. I am due in Liverpool on February 4, so look out for me.—Yours ever, Sydney H. Pyne."

Both gazed thoughtfully at the document for a few moments before Phyllis said:

"Does that mean we shall be rich, Bertie?"

Her companion emphasised the gratification of the plural pronoun by a squeeze.

"I hope so, sweet."

"That will be very nice, won't it? I will marry you even if you have to take a place in father's office; but it will be so much better if we haven't to explain to him that we are poor after all."

Mensmore laughed. "It is not so bad as that in any case," he said. "This Springbok Mine speculation will probably turn out well, but I look to Wyoming to yield the best and most permanent results."

"Why is Mr. Pyne coming to London?"

"Because it is only in London that capital can be obtained for large undertakings, and if the Wyoming Goldfield is really a valuable one we may be able to realise some portion of our interests for a considerable sum. Anyhow, he wants to consult me."

"Do you both own the ranch?"

"Yes; it was a joint transaction, but I found the money."

"And why did you come away?"

"Well, let me see. We made very little out of it, Phil, and as Pyne had two sisters, I thought it best to leave what there was for him. He was absurdly grateful about what he called my generosity in the matter, but now that the land has proved so valuable, of course all that nonsense is at an end, and we go half-shares in the deal."

"Two sisters! Were they pretty?"

"What? Jealous already! They are very nice, but much older than their brother and he is my senior by two years."

Miss Browne was graciously pleased to accept this explanation. She knitted her smooth brow into a reflective frown as she said:

"Mr. Pyne arrives on the 4th. It is now January 30th. You ought really to go home, Bertie."

"Now my dear sensible little woman is talking like her own self."

"Well, if you must I give you permission. But I did hope we should see Florence together."

"So we shall. I'll tell you what I will do. I will write to Pyne to-day, care of the steamer at Liverpool, tell him to go to my flat, and stay there a few days until I arrive, and go home myself at the end of next week. He is sure to spend some time in seeing the sights before tackling business, and he can do that as well without me as if I were there. A line to my old housekeeper, who has a spare key, will make the place habitable for him. Happy thought, I'll do it."

"And another happy thought! I'll come and watch you do it," cried Phyllis.

She did not notice that Mensmore's face clouded at this otherwise pleasant intimation. Nevertheless, he raced off with her to the saloon and seated himself at the writing-table. But before he placed pen to paper, Phyllis bending over him meanwhile, he suddenly exclaimed, in a tone of annoyance:

"Now, what a bore this is. I don't know how to address the letter to make sure of reaching him at once, and it is very important that it should not miss him."

"Father will know. Let's ask him."

"No," said Mensmore judicially. "I will row across the harbour to the Florio-Rubattino office, find out the exact thing, and send off the letter. Back in half-an-hour. Be good!"

And before Phyllis could argue the matter he was at the gangway shouting for a boat.

She blew a kiss at him as he shot over the narrow strip of water inside the mole, and little realised that Mensmore was saying to himself: "That was a narrow squeak. Never again, as long as I live, will I take another man's name. It causes no end of bother, and at the most unexpected moments."

He did not trouble the Florio-Rubattino people, as he well knew that a letter addressed to the White Star offices would insure any communication reaching his friend.

The context of the missive, as finally indited at the post-office explains his hesitancy to write it in the presence of his *fiancée*.

My dear Pyne,—Your good news is more than surprising. Although I believe you, I cannot yet grasp its full significance. However, let us leave explanations until we meet. I am fixed here for a few days more, as I have just become engaged to the sweetest girl in the world, but will return home at the end of next week. Meanwhile, I want you to take up your residence at my flat, No. 12, Raleigh Mansions, Sloane Square, where my housekeeper has instructions to receive you. Do not be surprised if you find the name of Pyne familiar there. Indeed, I took the place in your name in August last. However, all explanations when we meet.—Yours ever, Bertie Mensmore.

This, with a note to the housekeeper, Mrs. Robinson, and another to the hall-porter of the Universities Club, in case by any chance the Liverpool letter missed his friend, completed his task.

He laughed as he hurried from the post-office to the harbour.

"By Jove!" he said to himself, "won't old mother Robinson be surprised when she gets my letter telling her that another Mr. Pyne is coming from America, and that my name, concealed for family reasons, is Mensmore. I guess that Syd. will feel a bit mixed up, too, until I tell him the whole yarn."

No wonder his housekeeper would fail to understand him.

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Others, whose influence on his fortunes he little suspected were already puzzled by the circumstances. Brett, for instance, and Winter would have been very glad if some occult power enabled them to read the seemingly trivial letter posted that day in Genoa.

Every person known to the reader, and not the least the visitor from the United States, was on the eve of a mad whirl of events, the outcome of which no man could prophesy, but as yet one only, Reginald Brett, had the slightest suspicion that affairs were approaching a crisis.

When Mensmore reached the *White Heather* he found Lady Browne and Phyllis dressed for a drive before dinner. Sir William seized the opportunity to cross-examine his daughter's suitor as to his means. Phyllis was an only child, and her father did not propose that she should want, whatever the financial position of her husband might be. He liked Mensmore, and had ascertained by private inquiries that his social position was good.

"His father was a Major-General," said his informant, "but he lost his savings by speculation, and was unable to maintain his son in a crack cavalry corps, so the youngster resigned and went to America to try and better himself. There was a daughter, too, by the first wife, a very charming woman, who, when the crash came, was supposed to have gone on the stage. But I have never heard of her since."

So far the credentials were not bad; but Sir William thought it his duty to ascertain definite particulars.

Mensmore was quite candid with him.

"I have been somewhat of a rolling stone," he said, "but I am glad to believe that people have never had cause to think ill of me. At times my affairs have been at a desperate stage, but I hope such periods have passed for ever. I have already spoken to you about the Springbok Mine——"

The old gentleman nodded.

"Well, this morning I have received very satisfactory news from America," and he handed over Pyne's letter for perusal.

"Yes," said Sir William. "These things promise well. We will look into them when we reach England. Meanwhile I give my provisional sanction to my daughter's engagement. She is a good girl, Mensmore. She will be a true and excellent wife. I think you are worthy of her, and I hope that whatever clouds may have darkened your life will now pass away. You two ought to be happy."

"We will, sir," said Mensmore fervently.

"By the way, where is your sister? Is she in England or abroad?"

Mensmore had been expecting this question. He was prepared for it. "Mrs. Hillmer is my half-sister," he explained. "I have not seen much of her since—since an unhappy marriage she contracted some years ago."

"Indeed. Is her husband alive?"

"I can hardly tell you. I believe so. But she does not live with him. She is well provided for, but it was partly on account of this matter that I came to the Riviera for the winter. To tell the truth, I quarrelled with her about it."

"Ah, well. Her troubles need not affect Phyllis and you, except to give you warning. And take my advice. Never interfere between husband and wife. However good your motive ill is sure to come of it."

In the growing dusk Sir William Browne did not note the embarrassment of his companion in discussing this topic. Mensmore was essentially an honourable man, and he detested the necessity which forced him to permit false inferences to be drawn from his words. Yet there could be no help for it. He was compelled to suffer for the faults of another.

It was a relief to him when the dressing bell for dinner allowed him to escape to his cabin.

(To be continued.)

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MY MURDER: A CONFESSION.

I.

Though I am willing to record fully how and why I committed it, I decline to do more than indicate the place of the deed. Those who can recognise it by the clue I give, are at liberty to put two and two together.

Most people who have been to Switzerland will understand where the hotel of Les Trois Sages is situated. They will know that it is the chief hostelry of the large town at which the majority of tourists entering and returning from the region of the Alps usually halt, at least for a night, as from it diverge the main channels leading to the choicest scenery of the little republic.

They will recollect that the inn is charmingly placed on the banks of the Rhine, and that its balconies and windows look out upon and absolutely overhang the rushing river, not a hundred miles from its falls at Schaffhausen. Enough, then, as to the locality; now, as to my coming there, and what happened.

The superfluous energy of a Briton six-and-twenty years of age, six feet two in height, and strong in proportion, finds no better outlet than scrambling over peaks, passes, and glaciers; and I had been doing this, on the occasion of which I write, to my heart's content, for five or six weeks.

It was not my first experience of the Alps by many; but it had, on the whole, been the least enjoyable: the companion who was going with me disappointed me at the eleventh hour, and I started alone, the limited time for my outing not brooking delay; and though at times I fell in with pleasant people, I was bored by my solitude.

My temper too, always a peppery one at the best, was considerably ruffled by the loss, towards the end of my journey, of my remaining circular notes. I most stupidly flicked the little case containing them out of my breast-pocket with my handkerchief as I was leaning over the side of the steamer coming down from Flueln to Lucerne, and I had the mortification of seeing it sink into the blue lake before my very eyes.

My remaining cash was only just sufficient to carry me to—well, say Les Trois Sages— so immediately on reaching Lucerne I had to write home for more money, directing that it should await me at the aforesaid well-known hotel. I therefore timed my arrival there accordingly and it was not an hour too soon, for I could only just avoid over-staying my leave by starting for Paris by the first train the next day.

Hence it was with no little anxiety that on reaching my inn I demanded of the *concierge* whether there was any letter for me, and my satisfaction was so great when that majestic functionary handed me one, that I tore it open then and there, displaying the nature of its contents to the throng of waiters, porters, and idlers usually hanging about hotel halls.

It being late I was soon shown to my room—a luxurious one, for an alcove, where stood the bed, was divided from the *salon* by a heavy *portière*, thus making two apartments. I took little heed, however, of these vanities at the time. I was to be off early next morning, and ere long I was in bed and my light out. The loss of the money tended to make me unusually careful of that which I had just received; so, though I left my watch, etc. on the table in the *salon*, I laid the packet of notes on the little marble stand at the bed-head; and it was lucky I did so.

* * * * *

Sound asleep! Sound is not the word for it. Dead asleep would be nearer the mark; that sort of sleep which comes to a strong man in perfect health and training, after a fatiguing day's journey. What it was that aroused me from it I shall never clearly understand; but my belief is, that it was an instinct rather than a noise which caused me, without altogether returning to consciousness, to open my eyes.

My face was turned away from the wall against one side of which the bed stood, so that I looked straight across the little alcove, and through the half drawn *portière* into the *salon*.

The moon must have risen, for there was a much stronger light in the rooms than when I put out the candle, and a deep shadow was cast across the opening between them. Her rays thus flooded both apartments by the single window in each.

Now I was in that curious state that although I knew that I was awake I thought I was dreaming, in fact, I was just on that mysterious frontier-land between the two states, which is not the least perplexing amongst the phenomena of a mortal existence—that is to say, I thought I was dreaming—when I saw, on first opening my eyes, the figure of a man on all-fours, crawling out of the stream of moonlight in the *salon* into the shadow cast, as I have said, by the arch and heavy folds of the *portière*.

But I knew I was awake when, losing sight of him for a minute there, I saw him again emerging into the rays of light which fell across the floor of the alcove where I lay. I knew, I say, that I was awake now, for could I not distinguish plainly, as he came very slowly and stealthily towards the bed, that his face was hidden by a sort of crape mask? And yet still, for a moment more, I thought I must be dreaming. I had never moved or raised my head from the pillow; I had simply opened my eyes, and I still abstained from movement whilst endeavouring to realise in what condition I was.

Suddenly, however, all doubt disappeared. I took in on the instant the fact that this was an attempt at robbery, perhaps worse, for, approaching the little table at the bed-head, the figure, without rising from the floor, lifted one of its hands as if to reach the marble top. The man was within arm's length of me now, and without giving him the slightest warning by any preliminary movement, I endeavoured to spring out of bed straight upon him. For a second I had him by the collar; but not being able to get clear altogether from

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the bed-clothes I was checked, and he slipped out of my grasp like an eel, and disappeared in the shadow.

Instantly, however, I was on my feet; but thinking that the fellow probably would be armed I did not attempt to grope for him, but made straight through to the door of the *salon* giving on to the landing, intending to raise an alarm and prevent an escape, but before I could draw the bolt I saw him at the window opening on to the balcony. His figure came dark between me and the moonlight, and judging that, as the casement was open, he must have entered that way, and was now endeavouring to get out by it, I once more sprang towards him, and had him in my arms just as he stepped on to the balcony, and was in the act of climbing over it. He struggled for a moment or two desperately, of course; but my hot temper was up now, and thinking of nothing but the insolent audacity of the intrusion and the attempted robbery, I tore him away with great violence—for he was but like a child in his strength as compared to me—and saying in my fury, "Ho, ho, you scoundrel! you want to get out this way, do you? then, by George, you shall go!" I flung him, as if he had been a truss of straw, over the balcony into—good God! the rushing river below!

* * * * *

Then, and then only, for the first time, as my hands quitted hold of him, did I remember the situation of my rooms. I had been sleeping in different ones almost every night for the last six weeks, and in the suddenness and rapidity with which the whole of the incidents had happened I entirely forgot that below the balcony rushed the impetuous Rhine. Lightning does not express the swift keenness of the agony which shot through my brain, as glaring after the wretched man, I caught a faint glimpse of his falling figure, and heard the faintest cry and splash rise for a second above the rush of the torrent.

Not being skilled in describing sensations I abstain entirely from attempting to express what mine were now. I pulled myself together in a minute or two, endeavouring to collect my thoughts, and to settle what I ought to do. I walked to the table where I had left my watch—it was gone; to the little stand at the bed-head—my packet of notes were safe, but the hand which I had arrested, only just in time, as it rose towards them belonged to someone who knew that they were there, that was evident. Then my eye fell upon a black object lying on the floor in a streak of moonlight; it was a piece of folded crape with an elastic band attached. In the first encounter the thief's disguise had fallen off—here it was!—and I remembered that for a second on the balcony I had met the rascal's large dark eyes as they seemed starting from his head with terror.

The balcony! As I put my hand on the side of the balustrade, in the act of looking over, it touched the top of a light ladder, the other end of which, on examination I could now faintly discern, in the moonlight, rested not a dozen feet down on a long but less projecting balcony *entresol* to which this lower balcony belonged.

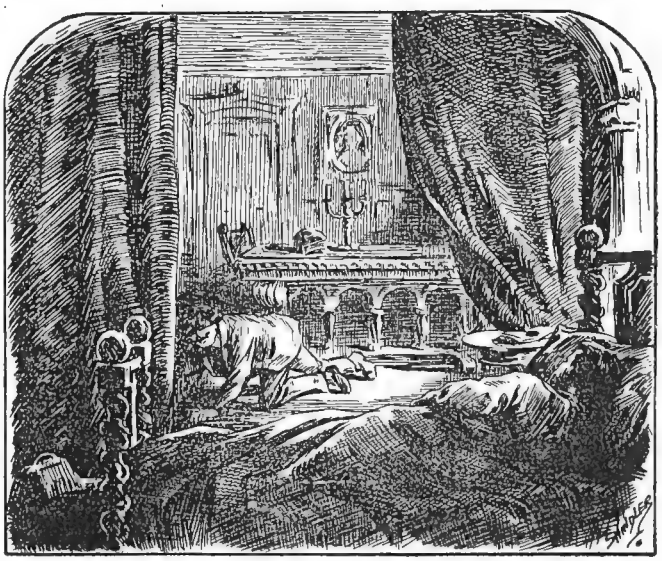
Clearly then, it was someone engaged about the house—a waiter probably—who had attempted to rob me; one of those who had seen me open my letter and examine the notes. I bethought me also, then, that my movements in my room must have been watched, or that stealthy hand would never have been raised with such fore-knowledge towards the spot where I had placed the money.

A long acquaintance with foreign habits had taught me that an amiable custom prevailed among this rascally scum of waiters of boring gimlet holes in the corners of the door panels, through which they might have become acquainted with the private proceedings of the occupants of the rooms, male or female.

I was not surprised, therefore, on rekindling my candle and examining my door, to find several of these *trous-judas*, as they were playfully called; one particularly so large and so directed, that anybody in the outer passage could easily observe all that went on within the room.

My impulse now was to raise an alarm; but an instant's reflection showed me that if I did I must bid good-bye to all thoughts of reaching Paris by the early train, and of saving the limit of my leave. And was it worth my while to do this? I decided in a moment—most certainly not.

Was I to expose myself to vast personal inconvenience and possible professional ruin, through not meeting my engagements, simply for the sake of explaining to the cumbersome law of the land what had happened, and to run the risk of not being able to do so to its satisfaction, and consequently perhaps of being incarcerated as a murderer? Not a bit of it. I would see the law of Switzerland at Jericho first! As it was, I had lost my watch, and my temper leapt up in rebellion at the thought, and easily persuaded me for the time that I should be little better than a fool to risk the prospects of my life by any act so quixotic. If the rascal were drowned, it was his own fault, and there should be an end of it, as far as I was concerned. So, at least, I thought then. No; I would be off as I proposed; and with this determination I began deliberately to dress



I saw the figure of a man on all fours crawling into the shadow.

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and pack my knapsack, for sleep was gone for that night. Only one doubt perplexed me. Should I leave the ladder standing where it was, and let the hotel authorities think what they liked, or (for otherwise it would only lead to inquiries and difficulties) should I fling it into the river after the man? Right or wrong, with very little hesitation I adopted the latter course.

Not a sign of life was visible as I looked once more out upon the broad river; and as I gently raised the ladder, and consigned it to its depths, I thought it was not the first secret by a good many that its impetuous current had carried away into oblivion.

An hour or two later I had quietly paid my bill at the bureau, and was on my way to Paris, and by the following night was once more in my chambers in the Temple.

II.

Argue, reason, justify, talk about self-defence, and if I hadn't done this, he would have done so-and-so, as much as you please, you can never quite philosophise away the very disagreeable sensation which will arise occasionally if you have ever had the misfortune, however unintentionally, to kill a man.

My hot temper has often given me cause for regret, not

I flung him over the balcony into the rushing river below.

to say remorse; but since the night when I flung the robber into the Rhine I can safely say I have curbed it.

Whenever it comes bubbling up, there also comes with it the vivid recollection of that brief struggle on the balcony, and lo! it is subdued on the instant; but the recollection, alas, is not so speedily dismissed; it still hovers painfully in my memory at times, though twelve years have passed since the deed was done—twelve years! during which no mention, that I have ever seen, has been made in the papers of anyone having been missed from the hotel.

Of course I have been often to Switzerland since, but somehow I have always avoided the town where stands the hostelry of Les Trois Sages, and I should never think of going up the Rhine again.

I strike the Alps now by other routes, and have a tendency to get well to the Ital an side of them. Indeed I have lately returned from a saunter amongst the hills in the neighbourhood of Como.

What capricious fate led me there to the spot where I was to find the sequel to "My Murder" need not be speculated upon; it was one of those strange coincidences, I suppose, which when met with in fiction excite little surprise, but when stated as facts are generally doubted. Here it is, however, and if it had not been a fact there would never have been any record on paper of "My Murder."

Well, I pulled up one day at an unpretentious little albergo, on the side of a steep declivity overlooking the "lazy" lake.

The light refreshment which I ordered was brought to me as I sat at a little table in the garden, sheltered by vines, olive, and fig-trees, by the padrone himself a venerable grey-bearded man.

Only as he set the fruit and bread down before me did I observe he was blind.

He had walked so steadily and direct from the house to where I sat that no one could have guessed at his affliction.

The sudden discovery of it, together with a sorrowful expression which his face wore, touched me, and I began talking to him with what Italian I could muster.

His speech showed him to be above the common herd and after conversing for a while about the neighbourhood, and such ordinary topics, I ventured to touch on his blindness.

"Oh," said he, "that is very little, signor; men can be more severely tried than by having to live in the dark. There are worse afflictions than that."

"Indeed," I answered; "do you speak from experience?"

"Truly, signor, I do."

"You surprise me; I should have thought nothing could be worse. Do you mind telling me what you have found so?"

"No," he said, slowly sitting down opposite to me; "but it is a sad tale, I doubt if it can amuse the signor; but, if he is willing to listen, I am willing to tell. It sometimes eases the heart to pour out its troubles even into the ear of a stranger. But stay, let us know how the time goes, for I have some affairs to attend to by and by."

Whilst speaking he thrust a hand into the pocket of his vest, and, drawing out a watch without a chain, held it towards me, adding:

"What is the hour, signor? we blind folk are a little helpless in these matters."

I looked into his large brown palm and was about to answer, but the words stuck in my throat, for surely it was not the first time I had seen that dial.

"Permit me," I said after a pause, as, pretending not to be able to quite able to see it, I endeavoured to turn the watch over in his hand that I might by a glance at

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the back of it verify the idea which had crossed my mind.

He felt what I was doing, and said:

"The signor will find the time by the front, and not the back."

I was about to answer, but the words stuck in my throat.

"Surely," I answered; "it is three o'clock. But that is an English watch you have, is it not?"

"The signor is curious; can it signify to him of what manufacture it is?" replied the padrone, in rather an altered tone, but not rudely.

"Oh, no," I answered carelessly, not wishing to arouse any suspicions in him; "it only struck me as strange to find an English watch in these parts. Pray let me look at it."

With a return of his former sorrowful manner, and with an air of resignation, he reluctantly handed me his watch, saying:

"Certainly, if I tell you one thing I may as well tell you all."

A glimpse of the back revealed my own crest and initials; but I restrained the expression rising to my lips, and went on, "Ah, a good watch; may I ask how you came by it?"

"Yes, it will appear in what I have to say; it is all sad, and is only one of the many troubles which made me an old man before my time. Very sad indeed is all that hangs about that watch. It belonged to my son, my only son; at least it was found upon him when he was dead."

Needless to say how I winced under the old man's words. He continued, as he passed a hand across his sightless eyes.

"Yes, signor, he is dead these many years past, and perhaps it is as well. But, ah me! the way of it—there is my grief. Could it have been that I had been by, and have known that there was ever so little repentance in his heart, there would have been some little comfort for me, perhaps; but, as it was, it is too probable that he went unshriven, unrepentant, suddenly to his account."

"Tell me, tell me," I said quickly, "the way of his death!" But the padrone was not to be hurried. He seemed to like to linger on the pain his slowly-uttered words brought with them, little guessing how they were paining me also.

He went on: "Ever a prodigal from his youth upward, my boy grew worse and worse as he reached manhood. I had looked that he should inherit my business and good name, for they were both worth inheriting at one time. I kept an hotel at Bergamo, and for a while he was my chief waiter, but his vicious courses brought ruin on us both. He contracted debts which I had to pay; ran away in evil company, and I heard nothing of him for years.

"When I did it was, as usual, with a demand for money. He was then in Switzerland as a waiter, I believe, at the hotel of Les Trois Sages—the signor knows it, of course, all the English know it—and there, I afterwards heard, it was that he, in the act probably attempting some desperate crime, fell one night into the Rhine, and was picked up dead as appeared.

"Only by a miracle could it have been that his body was not carried straight away down over the falls at Schaffhausen but it seems that he got entangled with the chain of the ferry which crosses the Rhine, as you know, a little below the hotel.

"Here again, by a miracle, it chanced that he was seen by some men who were early working at some timber rafts, and was by them carried ashore, as I have said, for dead!"

"But was he?" I inquired, with an anxiety I could ill disguise, as the old man paused.

"No, signor; it was not his destiny to be drowned—would that it had been, for then he would have been saved from the commission of his greatest crime! No; he was restored, to return to me and pile upon me further anguish.

"He came back to Bergamo a year or two after to a smaller inn, which I was then keeping, and in a drunken brawl with some of his loose companions he used his knife with a fatal result upon an unarmed man, whose friend on the instant stabbed my son to the heart! That is all, signor; but the remembrance of his career has been far worse for me than the darkness."

"And the watch," I suggested, with a sense of relief quite inexpressible, "was found in his possession?"

"Yes, signor; but I doubt if he had come by it honestly, for they tell me there are a device and letters on the back in no way belonging to him. But still I treasure it for his sake, or rather for his mother's, for he was all that remained to me of her, and she idolised him for the five years that she was spared after his birth; and," added the old man, in a somewhat more cheery tone, as if the recital of his troubles had relieved him, "a good English watch is useful even to a blind man."

Most assuredly the last thing in my thoughts was to deprive him of his treasure. I was only too well repaid for my loss by what I had just heard; only too grateful for being able, after all, even to look back with complacency upon what I nevertheless still call "My Murder!"

W. W. Fenn.

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THE CURATE'S LAST HALF-CROWN.

I WAS a poor curate residing down in the country.

Those were the old days of pluralism, and my rector was a great pluralist. He had two canonries, two rectories, a vicarage, a prebendal stall, a snug office in an ecclesiastical court, and an archdeaconry.

It was quite obvious that he could not inhabit all his houses at the same time, and so he graciously allowed me the use of his vicarage house, deducting something from my stipend; but, let it be said to his credit, not so much as he could legally have done on his own account.

He would come down to Cherrington, so called, perhaps, on account of the abundant cherry-orchards in our district, once a year, when he preached the village-club sermon and looked after his tithes.

Of course I married. It seems the destiny of the impecunious curate—what they must all come to. A bachelor curate would have very little chance among the cherry-cheeked maidens of Cherrington, all ripe, with delicate w ite and glowing red.

Farmer Dawson, the churchwarden for our parish, gloried in the singularity of having only one curate, and was very friendly and neighbourly. I used to turn in on a Sunday afternoon, for evening services at that time were hardly known in country places, and used to smoke a pipe with the farmer, and partake of his home-made wine and home brewed ale, until Mary called us in to tea.

Mary and I married—a very obvious course—and the six little ones came on with all the regularity of the cherry season. My father-in-law said that he should leave Mary fifteen hundred pounds when he died, and in the meantime allow us the interest.

I became very much attached to my work, and very fond of the house and noble grounds; indeed, our vicarage grounds were quite famous in our part of the country. At the same time I felt that it was the warm nest on a tottering bough. I was not my own master and every curate has an insane idea that he would like to be his own master; whereas, after my own experience, I can say that it is much easier and happier to be ruled than to rule, and in all my preferments I never was happier than in my first humble curacy. But I am anticipating. Here was I dreading the breaking of the bough, when that breaking of the bough in a kindly Providence was to bring some very strange things about.

There were two ways in which my bough might incontinently break. The curacy being an unusually snug one, the Rev. Dr. Jennifer might chose to eject me and appoint some private friend of his own. But, to do him justice, he was a quiet easy-going man. His own lines had fallen to him in snug, pleasant places, and he would not like to inflict hard lines upon any man. But there was the chance that, having had so many good things, he might cap them all by taking a bishopric, which would necessarily vacate all his appointments. There was also the chance that he might shuffle off this mortal coil, albeit tenderly attached to the mortal coil, and much nourishing and cherishing it. I should say that the bishop of our own diocese had local ties which brought him very much into our neighbourhood. Dr. Jennifer considered himself quite as good a man as our bishop, and I believe in point of income was the better man of the two. These were days before the administration of Church funds by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners was commenced.

Some of the bishops had immense revenues under the old arrangement, whereas others were much poorer than under the present equalised arrangements. Among these latter was our own bishop. He had one or two farms in our parish.

All the society in our own neighbourhood was made up of farmers; we had no estated gentlemen, that is to ay, the bishop owned a small tract, and all the rest belonged to a great duke, whose castle was twenty miles away, and owned all the land between us and the castle.

Our bishop was comparatively poor, and made himself poorer than he need be. He never took fines and rack-rents; he granted leases, he improved the Church property, he maintained schools; he bore cheerfully even more than his share of the burdens upon land, that land which seems to me to be always grievously burdened.

So when the good bishop came down to these parts, which was pretty often, he would sometimes turn aside for a night or two at the vicarage, when he would romp with the little ones and talk with me about the Greek poets over a pipe and some of my father-in-law's home-brewed in the evening.

The very reverend vicar, an archdeacon of Archdeacon Grantley's own stamp, died suddenly of gout in the stomach. It was rather unhandsome of the gout, which generally troubles fingers and toes before making a sudden final descent upon such a very vital region.

Of Dr. Jennifer's numerous appointments, the vicarage of Cherrington was in the gift of the Lord Chancellor. Ordinarily, Chancellor's livings are not very good; but this was one of the best, being between four and five hundred, so I should have about as much chance of getting the living by applying for it as of going to the moon in a balloon.

But for all that I made up my mind that I would apply for it, and thought that now was the time when my happy friendship with the bishop might stand me in good stead.

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It so fortunately happened that a few hours later the bishop, riding by on his cob to visit one of his farms, drew up to talk about the news which the morning's post had brought respecting this lamented demise.

"I am very sorry," said the good bishop when he had patiently listened to the story of my pains and expectations, "but I am afraid, though you may not think so, that I am the last man able to do you any good. I never asked a favour of any man; and if I did so, I do not think that my asking would have the slightest weight with the Lord Chancellor."

"I confess, my lord," I said, "that I had ventured to count upon your influence."

"But I have no influence, my dear Mr. Vavasour," said the bishop. "I have never given a party support to this Government or any Government, I go to London as little as I can, and am always glad to get out of it as soon as I can. Some of my episcopal brethren get little notes from the Treasury asking them to be in their places at certain times, or to use their influence with certain people. The Treasury never think it worth their while to send any little notes to me."

I could not help smiling at the engaging frankness of my worthy diocesan.

Evidently my poor bough had broken down altogether. It was not to be bound up by any care of mine.

"There is just one thing that I can do for you, Vavasour," said the bishop kind-heartedly, "without the least impropriety. I cannot ask him to give you the living, but I will write a few lines which you can show at any time to the Chancellor, or anyone else you choose."

The worthy bishop dismounted, and entering the study wrote a few lines, in which he stated, to my grateful confusion, that I was a good scholar, and had worked my parish admirably.

"And if I can ever do anything for you, of course I will," he added. "But you are still quite a young man, and there are worthy men who have grown grey in the diocese who have a first claim on me."

I discussed matters with my wife. My fix was really a terrible one. An incoming vicar could eject me in six weeks. So good a curacy might not be obtainable for years; and, indeed, I might not be able to obtain any curacy at all precisely at the moment I wanted it.

It was hoping against hope; but still this journey must be made. It was fifty miles off; but Farmer Dawson would take me over in his gig until I should meet a railway—a new-fangled invention betokening the end of the world, as was thought at Cherrington, and only then coming into use.

It was a long journey in those days; but I started at early dawn in order that, if possible, I might see the Lord Chancellor the same day.

Tea and candles were not procurable in our village—that is to say, of any degree of excellence—and I was to buy them in London.

Also I had a mysterious mission—to call at certain shops and get some gorgeous articles of attire for baby, with which she was to petrify the local mind on the forthcoming occasion of her being christened. I was to attend to these things—so ran the wife's instructions—the very first thing of all, so that I might make sure of them.

I verily believe that she considered the matter of a living as being of quite inferior importance to the matter of baby's hood and bonnet.

By these means my little stock of money, quite inconsiderable at first, grew "small by degrees, and beautifully less."

Emptying it out of my pockets and examining it just before I set out to leave my card upon the Chancellor, I found that it was reduced to a single half-crown and a few smaller coins, which might possibly bring me home again, after making allowance for a crust of bread-and-cheese and a glass of beer.

I duly turned the coins over and—shall I confess it?—spat upon them for luck's sake, according to a legend which I had inherited from my ancestors, and set off to make the acquaintance in a friendly way of his lordship the Chancellor.

But, like Bob Acres, my courage was imperceptibly oozing out of my toes as I drew near the big silent house where the great man kept the King's conscience in his bag.

Putting on a very painful expression of appearing to be entirely at ease, I ascended the steps and made a courageous imitation of an aristocratic double-knock.

"Is the Lord Chancellor at home?" I inquired of a bloated specimen of a British flunkey, who made his appearance.

"His lordship is not at home," answered the man, with just a suspicion of impudence in his voice.

"Can you tell me when he will be at home?"

"No, I can't," said the man, in a tone that convinced me of its insincerity, and he was evidently preparing to bang the door in my face, or something very like it.

Now I had heard in my time of the virtues of palm-oil. The human hand being lubricated with a composition of silver becomes tender and mollified. To use plainer terms, it occurred to me that it might be a useful thing to bribe the British flunkey.

But then arose the question of the wherewithal to bribe him. I had but my half-crown, my solitary coin of weight, my little all, my beautiful, my last. If I parted with my half-crown, I might have to trudge back to Cherrington.

All my earthly hopes just now were centred on my having an interview with the Lord Chancellor. I did not see any possible way of getting it unless this fellow would give me admittance. I felt very much inclined to believe that the Chancellor might be indoors at that very minute.

With a despairing clutch I grasped my last half-crown. Its seven brethren of the last sovereign which I had changed, had taken to themselves wings, and had all flown away in the course of the day. It was a desperate speculation, but I thought that I would venture this last half-crown on the chance, however remote, that something good might turn up from it. I slipped, not without a severe twinge, the last half-crown—the last rose of summer was a mere nothing to it—and said:

"I am sure, my good fellow, that you know the way how to bring me into speech with the Lord Chancellor."

"Lor, bless you!" he said, with a grin, as he pocketed the half-crown, which would be something far less to him than it would be to me. "It's of no use in the world your coming here, thinking that you may be able to see my Lord Chancellor. I thought that everybody knew that his lordship at this time of the year is almost always in the Court of Chancery."

"But he comes home," I said, thinking that my half-crown might persuade the man, at some time or other to usher me into the august presence.

"Bless your heart, we never knows when he comes home. He may have to go and see the Prime Minister or some other nobleman about business, or he may have

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to go down to the House of Lords, or he may go to his own private rooms at the House of Lords."

"But he comes home," said the man, with another grin; "but do you think that he would see you after all his work, for all that? Unless you have an appointment with him it would be more than my place is worth to let you in."

I thought of reclaiming the half-crown; but that was obviously impossible.

"And do you mean to say that I shall never be able to see him?"

"Well, sir," he said, "I see you're a thorough gentleman, and I'll put you up to a way by which you most likely may be able to see him. You should go to Chancery Lane, sir. He has got a little private room close to his court, and you might find him there. At least, you are certain to find him there if you are at the place in good time. Most likely he'll speak to you if you send in your name and business. He's a haffable gentleman after all, in spite of people being so frightened of him."

At all events, I had now got hold of a piece of definite intelligence in return for my money. I made my way to the Holborn end of Chancery Lane.

I threaded a variety of complications among the Law Courts, where I saw quite a variety of judges sitting in robed state, as like one another as one egg is to another egg, or one old woman to another old woman.

At last I stumbled upon the Lord Chancellor's court; but I was positively informed that "the court had risen," which legal phrase, as I subsequently gathered, signified that when the clock had pointed at four the Lord Chancellor gathered his legal petticoats around him and fled the place to recruit his vexed soul with a dry biscuit and some dry sherry.

I was out in a minute in a decidedly dark and awkward passage.

"And can you tell me where the Lord Chancellor is?" I asked of a little red man against whom I had stumbled in the passage, apparently another specimen of the usher species. "Can you tell me which is his private room?"

"And what do you want of the Lord Chancellor," he inquired, "that you want to go to his private room?"

"That is my business, my friend," I answered, a little nettled that "man, proud man, dressed in a little brief authority," should thus put me through my paces.

"And what *is* your business?" inquired the man, fixing upon me one of the sharpest and most penetrating glances that I ever felt in my life.

"The world's a wide one, my friend," I answered, "and there's room enough in it both for you and for me. I suppose I may want to see the Lord Chancellor without telling you all about it."

"But I *am* the Lord Chancellor," said the little old man with another of those penetrating gazes.

I was really so dumfounded that I did not at all know what to say.

"You look to me," he said, with another of those sharp looks which literally seemed to transfix one, "like some poor devil of a curate who's come out of the country to worry me about some living."

"My lord," I said, "you have stated the facts of the case with great accuracy. I am an unfortunate curate who have come up to London on purpose to speak about a living."

"Come in here," he said, with an amused twinkle of the eye and a not unkindly voice. "I was just going away for the day, but I can spare you five minutes."

He led the way into a small room, comfortably but very plainly furnished, nothing like so good as my own study at Cherrington vicarage.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he said, with an almost cruel abruptness.

I stated my case in a few brief, but I really think I may venture to say vigorous and well-chosen, words. At least I had conned them again and again during my recent journeying, in case I should manage to get an interview.

"Have you any references or papers of any kind?"

"None, my lord, except a few words from my bishop. He is the only person of influence with whom I have any acquaintance."

"The Bishop of ——. I think Cherrington is in his diocese."

"Just so, my lord." And I produced the bishop's brief testimonial letter.

The Chancellor rapidly glanced at it, and next he glanced at his watch.

"I see, Mr. Vavasour, that the five minutes of which I spoke to you are out."

I stood mute and disappointed.

"Would eight o'clock in the morning be too early for you to call on me at my residence?"

"Oh, no, my lord," I said.

I should have said the same thing respecting any other hour he might have named.

He gave me a nod, which I rightly interpreted as a dismissal.

In a few minutes I was blundering, half-dazed, among the cabs, carts, and omnibuses of Chancery Lane. I had no other course than to go to an hotel and remain there in person until Mr. Dawson, in his capacity of father-in-law or churchwarden, should release me, with a view to Sunday's duties.

I was close to the Lord Chancellor's house the next morning, and hung about it till the bells of a neighbouring church-tower should clash eight.

I then gave my customary double-knock. My friend of the preceding afternoon opened it, and for a moment a pantomimic gesture of surprise stole over his impassive features. Without a word he ushered me into a dining-room close by.

It was a dull cold morning, and the Lord High Chancellor was stretching his right honourable person on a rug in front of the fire. He advanced and shook hands.

"Ah, Mr. Vavasour, good-morning! Have you breakfasted?"

As a matter of fact, I had only had a biscuit and a glass of water. So I said that I had not.

"Very well. Then you shall have some breakfast with me. Burroughs," to the man, "bring some cold chicken and another tea-cup."

I sat down amazed. In all my experience I had never heard of the like of this—that I should take a friendly bit of breakfast with the Lord Chancellor.

"Now, Mr. Vavasour, not to keep you in any suspense, I may tell you at once that I mean to give you my living of Cherrington."

"My lord, my lord!"

"I find, Mr. Vavasour, that you are a scholar, which is not the case with every clergyman. I find also that you have so far managed the parish of Cherrington very creditably. I have these two facts on the excellent testimony of the Bishop of——. Now I assure you, Mr. Vavasour, that I have very often great anxiety about these livings. I am most anxious to appoint the best man. The difficulty is to find out the best man.

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But in the present case I have no difficulty on this point. I can place the utmost reliance upon your bishop's recommendation."

"I am sure, my lord, that I will do my very best, all my days, to deserve it."

"I am quite sure you will. But I appoint you simply and solely upon the strength of what the Bishop of—— says about you. I have not sat so long with him in the Upper House without seeing how thoroughly good and honest he is. And please tell the bishop when you next see him, with my best regards, that I have had great pleasure in giving you this living in consequence of his favourable report. After breakfast I will give you a line to my secretary of presentations, who will put you in the way of all necessary steps."

I hardly know how I got through my breakfast, but in some fashion I did so, and I know that it did me good.

With a full heart I left the house, knowing that my fortune was made. I glanced at Burroughs, the man in the hall.

If I had had the money in my pocket, his half-crown ought to have blossomed into a five pound note. But I regret to confess that Burroughs has never received the five pound note.

Indeed, though I was now practically a beneficed clergyman, I had nothing in my pocket that could take me home.

The thought occurred to me that I might ask a cousin of mine, a lawyer in a good way of business, to help me. I went and asked him to lend me a sovereign to enable me to return home.

"No," he said, buttoning up his sensitive breeches pockets. "I make it a rule never to lend anything to anybody."

"As a minister of the gospel, I must remind you that we are told that we ought at times to lend."

"Mr. Vavasour, I am perfectly shocked to hear a clergyman of the Church of England talk in such a way. I knew, too, you had made a poor sort of marriage; but I did not think that you had sunk so low as to be driven to borrow a sovereign."

"I don't know what you mean by sinking so low. I only know that the Lord Chancellor, with whom I have just breakfasted, has given the living of Cherrington, which is more than four hundred a year."

"Whew!" said my second cousin, with a sort of gasp. "That quite alters the case. Now I dare say, my dear Vavasour, that you will want some money to pay induction expenses, stamp duty, dues to Queen Ann's Bounty Office, and that sort of thing. I can lend you a hundred pounds on the usual business terms."

I did not express my opinion of the fellow, but borrowed a proffered sovereign to enable me to return to Mary and the little ones. I sent it back to him in the shape of a guinea next day, and have not seen him from that day to this. It is astonishing how ready people are to oblige you when you are in reality independent of their help. Even dear old Dawson left me, I believe, a much bigger slice of his property than he would have done if I had been a poor man.

This was the way in which I planted my footsteps on the first rung of the ladder of clerical promotion, of that great success in life for which I cannot feel too humble and too grateful.

[This was substantially a story of early days which a very distinguished dignitary used to relate of himself. Its leading incident is strictly true, and seems worthy of a safer record than mere tradition.]

IDEAL BEAUTY

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The following is an extract from a Signed Article appearing in "Woman" of December 12th, 1900:

"The specialist who will teach a simple, and harmless gospel of reduction by safe, healthful, and withal pleasant means is Mr. F. Cecil Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, who makes no secret of his method, but clearly describes it in his book, 'Corpulency and the Cure,' which he will give to any sufferer from overstoutness who will apply for it, and send him two penny stamps to cover its postage."

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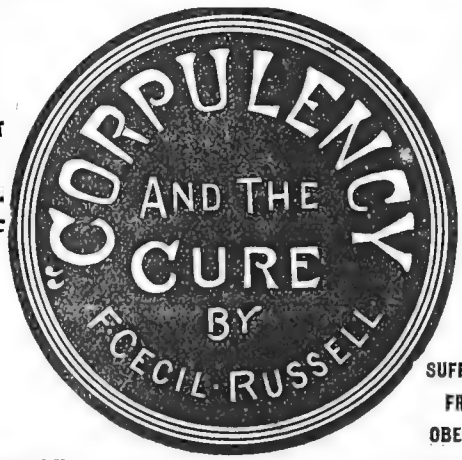

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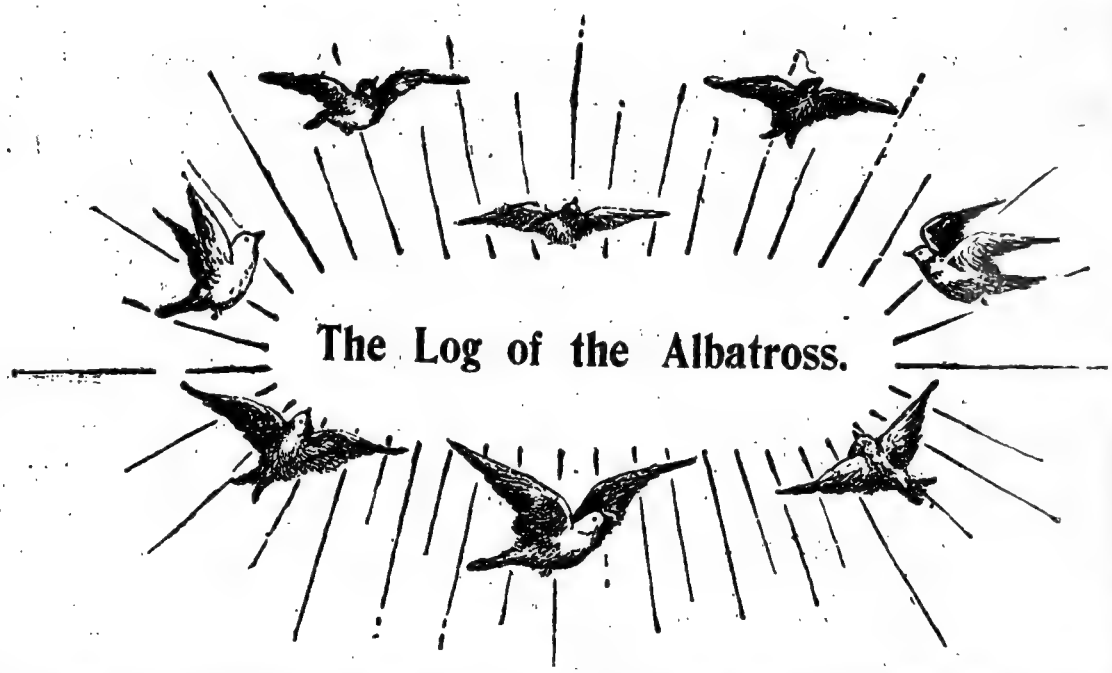

The Log of the Albatross.

It is a very, very simple tale that there is to tell; the story a woman's faithful hope—just that.

Of all the women I have ever known, Beata Mandrix was, I think, the noblest-hearted, and the truest.

Hers was, in one way at least, no ideal life, as her husband, between whom and herself there existed the most perfect affection, was away from her, and from his home, nine months out of the twelve; he being in command, and part-owner of the sailing barque *Albatross*, a fine teak-built vessel of some 700 tons burden, trading to the West Indies, and the coast of the Southern American States, between, that is, Florida and Chesapeake Bay!

Now, for a sailor's wife, Beata Mandrix was strangely ignorant of the manners and customs of the sea, and this for two reasons.

First, because David Mandrix, thoroughgoing seaman though he was, invariably left ship matters strictly behind him at the Dock Gates, believing in the complete contrast of wife and home, and home interests, and also it must be said in woman having quite enough worry in connection with her own domestic affairs, without having the anxieties and responsibilities of man's especial sphere added to the heap.

Then, secondly, Beata was an inland country girl, born and bred in Shakespeare's County, lovely Warwickshire. Ormiston Farm, far from the sound and smell of the salt sea, had been her little world, until she met David Mandrix, and by that time her love for wood and meadow, leafy lane and golden corn-field, had become a very part of her nature, which not even the magic words of one who knew so well the wondrous secrets of the mighty deep, could charm away or displace.

So it was, therefore, that when, during one of his rare home residences, Captain David's wife told him one day of a certain dream she had had, he was the more astonished, and even puzzled.

"You are sure," he said to her, "that the word 'log' was distinctly conveyed to your mind, sleeping though you were?"

"Yes, dear, spread out before me was a large book, with, along the top of each page, printed in large type: 'Ship's Log. Barque *Albatross*, of London.' In a sort of cloud appeared your head, out of it also seeming to stretch your hand and arm. You, or your hand rather, wrote something which I could not quite decipher upon the right hand page, then after signing your name at the foot, and deliberately tearing out the page, you and it vanished, leaving the mutilated book in front of me. It remained a moment, and then also disappeared, and I awoke."

"I should have said that your last night's supper had disagreed with you," said the captain, smilingly, "but I can't get over the 'log.' You've never heard the word before, at least not from me; and more than all, the words on the top of the pages of the book are absolutely correct. I'm not superstitious, although I am a sailor, but I must confess to being a bit mystified over this thing."

Beata was, somehow, sorry that she had told him, for he was to sail next day, and she could not shake off the notion that a disaster of some kind was in the near future about to befall her husband.

She was angry with herself for indulging in this train of thought, the more so because she could not shake off the impression it created in her mind.

David Mandrix would never allow his wife to "see him off." He had a horror of scenes, and felt that the parting, as parting there must be, was better gone through in the privacy of home than in the presence of a crowd of "all sorts and conditions," with whom it was no matter of concern whatever.

This particular trip of the *Albatross* was to be longer than usual, as she was to extend her voyage to Demarara, there to open up a new trade, if possible, the demand for British Guinea products having increased of late.

As a proper understanding of the ship's adventures will be better arrived at by accompanying her on her course, it may be just said that Beata sat down to wait the issue, possessing her soul in patience, although an

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RESCUED FROM DRINK

Heroic Work of a Girl in Saving Her Brother from Drunkenness.

Put a Remedy in His Coffee and Without His Knowledge of the Secret Was Completely Cured.

The terrible evil of drunkenness has at last found a conqueror. Miss Mary Roberts, of 1033 Golden Gate Ave., San Francisco, Cal., U.S.A., will gladly tell any lady who will write her how

she saved her brother from ruin, and her words burn with a new hope to every woman who would rescue a son, brother, or husband from the scourge of drunkenness.

"May every mother, sister, or daughter learn from my experience, is my devout hope, and in thus making public the story of our private misfortune and subsequent blessings it is my earnest desire that every woman read in my words the way to happiness, not only for herself but for the man who is struggling with the curse of liquor upon him. Dr. Haines, who discovered Golden Specific, is deserving of woman's homage, and I am glad to know that he will send a free trial package of the remedy to every woman who writes him.

"Send your name and address to Dr. J. W. Haines, 3248 Glen Bldgs., Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A., and he will mail the remedy to you in a plain, sealed package, and thus you can begin the cure at once. The remedy is odourless and tasteless, and you need have no fear of discovery."

Remember, a letter to us from British Isles requires 2½ postage. Write your name and address very plain, or, better still, enclose a self-addressed envelope so there can be no mistake in delivery.

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KNOCKING OTHERS IN THE SHADE ALTOGETHER.

100 High Street,
Mountain Ash, South Wales.

Dear Sir,—Just a line to acknowledge having received the beautiful present; it was beyond expectation. There are a lot of goods from a Glasgow firm but nothing compared with the British Goldsmiths Company's goods. We are knocking them in the shade altogether. Everyone who has bought our goods speak very well of them. I will do my best for your Company in little Wales.—Yours fraternally,
WILLIAM WILLIAMS.

WRITE US TO-DAY. ONLY A POST-CARD.

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"We have received some samples of the jewellery now being sold by the British Goldsmiths Co., the value of which is really wonderful considering the low prices asked for the goods. The British Goldsmiths Co. send out their goods to be sold by those who wish to put their spare time to good advantage. We should think there would be little difficulty about selling the goods we have before us. They are substantial, well finished, and cheap. The company offers a handsome present free to all persons selling a certain number of these articles."—HOME SWEET HOME, *Jan.* 5th., 1901.

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Mr. Geo. R. Sims' Discovery "TATCHO."

20,000 LARGE (4/6 SIZE) BOTTLES TO BE DISTRIBUTED.

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"When I discovered the preparation, I found that I had hit upon a remedy capable of working wonders," said Mr. George R. Sims to the representative of the *Daily Mail*. "Look at my hair now. Look at the colour. In time people got to know. Then the trouble began.

"Letters in thousands poured in to me from men and women in every quarter of the world, from all parts of the Kingdom, from America, India, Africa, China, and Australia. The work of answering the letters was enormous, and as far as possible the desired information was supplied; but it became quite evident that at the rate at which the demand was increasing I should very soon need a large staff of clerks to attend solely to the Hair renewer department of correspondence.

"In consequence, I said to myself. Why should this thing go on? If the public wants my hair renewer, the public shall have it; but the demand must be met in the ordinary business-like way. So I resolved to place the genuine article within reach of all, and with the assistance of a number of gentlemen, possessing the necessary commercial facilities, that has been accomplished."

THE GEO. R. SIMS' COMPANY HAVE DECIDED TO DISTRIBUTE

20,000 LARGE TRIAL BOTTLES OF TATCHO

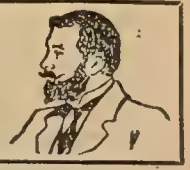
to enable those who have not yet profited by Mr. G. R. Sims' discovery, to have the opportunity of doing so. The Company does this in the belief that such distribution will enable the preparation to become more widely known, and will introduce it to every home in a far more satisfactory manner than through unlimited puffing by advertisement.

COUPON.
S.S.
Feb. 9, 1901.

If you are desirous of participating in this distribution cut out this Coupon and send it to the Geo. R. Sims' Co., 81a Great Queen Street, London, W.C., accompanied by a postal order for 1/10. You will receive by return of post a plain package containing

A FULL SIZE 4s. 6d. TRIAL BOTTLE OF "TATCHO" POST PAID,

which will enable you to give TATCHO a fair trial and to satisfy yourself as to its merits.



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ever deepening grey shadow, such as she had never known before, rendered her task of waiting a weary one, at times, almost an insupportable one.

All went well with the *Albatross* until she reached one of the Azores, where she put in for a few days to repair a mysterious leak which had appeared a few days before.

Putting to sea again on the fifth day, during a stiff breeze, that rapidly freshened into a gale, the barque held a straight course for St. Thomas'.

A brave man to his heart's core, David Mandrix could not help feeling unwontedly uneasy after leaving the little Spanish port.

He argued with himself and took himself severely to task for giving way to fancies, engendered he knew by a recollection of that strange dream of his wife's on the eve of his leaving England.

It was well perhaps for him that he had not much time for morbid brooding, for the exigences of the ship's situation, in the teeth of an Atlantic storm, demanded his whole energy and attention.

Still his thoughts, even when a fiercer blast of wind than usual, threatened to carren the vessel, would turn to the anxious little woman living alone in that quiet country village, and to what he was beginning to assure himself was a prophetic intimation of calamity for both of them.

He fought vigorously against the desire to make the prophecy true by writing a message to his wife upon a blank page of the ship's log, and signing it, that when the need came, he might commit the book to the sea, hoping that the friendly element would cast it up at the feet of his Beata.

Every day, every hour the probability became almost certainty that the hand of God was in the thing, and that He does speak to the children of men in these latter days in dreams and visions of the night.

It was when, the leak having broken out again, the *Albatross* became practically water-logged, that David seriously bent his mind to the carrying out the notion that had been haunting his brain night and day.

It was a dark night, the sky a vast black pall. The wind whistled and tore through the shattered rigging, to which was added intermittent storms of heavy rain and sleet.

Giving the command over to his chief officer, David went below to his cabin, and shut to the door.

He could hardly keep his feet, so sharp was the angle taken by the ship every now and again, when struck by a heavy sea.

He got out the log, and placing it on the lid of his chest, propped it up as well as he could, and on a fair blank page wrote the following:

SWEETHEART

I am thinking of you, and praying that this may not last very long. God bless you, my darling, and always remember that your love for me has been the one good thing of my life. Good-bye! Good-bye!

Your own DAVID.

From David Mandrix, master of the barque *Albatross*, of London, to Mrs. Beata Mandrix, of Rosedene, Farnham, Surrey, England.

Wrapping the book itself in a piece of sail-cloth, several times folded, he bound it firmly up, and going out upon the deck made the package fast to a large spare spar—a top-gallant yard.

At the moment when he judged the ship had but five minutes life left in her, he with the help of Andrews, the mate, cast the spar with its message into the sea.

That was on July 6th. On Nov. 10th, in the same year, a big liner was breaking her record to New York, when on a calm, clear day, the look-out saw and reported a spar with an object—he could not say exactly what—attached.

Without stopping the steamer's way, a large grapnel let down grabbed the spar as it drifted past, and hauled it aboard.

* * * * *

On Christmas Eve a woman sits alone in a fire-lit little room with her hands before her, gazing abstractedly into the red coals.

She sees all sorts of things there, things that make her, to tremble and sob.

A letter is brought in to her, and a large unfamiliar-looking package.

She is impelled, somehow, to open the latter first. It contains a large parchment-covered book. There is no title upon the front or back.

She opens it, and it falls apart, at the portion of it where one page, the right, is written upon, the left a blank.

Is it a dreaming over again, only more vividly, the dream of that other night, months ago?

It is the same book, and the message there transcribed is the one thing only needed to complete the vision.

I cannot say that she weeps—she cannot. Oh! that she could!

Tenderly! so tenderly! she removes the precious leaf and sits with it, poor soul, holding it in her two hands till morning light.

Then tears flow, and the relief is great.

And her treasure?—that leaf of the *Albatross's* Log?—she has it to-day, holds it, prizes it as her best, her choicest treasure, for is it not her David's message as he made to cross the river and enter the haven on the other side?

And she would join him there, some day soon—her David; she would show him that she never forgot!

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The Capture of the Boer Capitals, and the Hoisting of the Flag at Pretoria.

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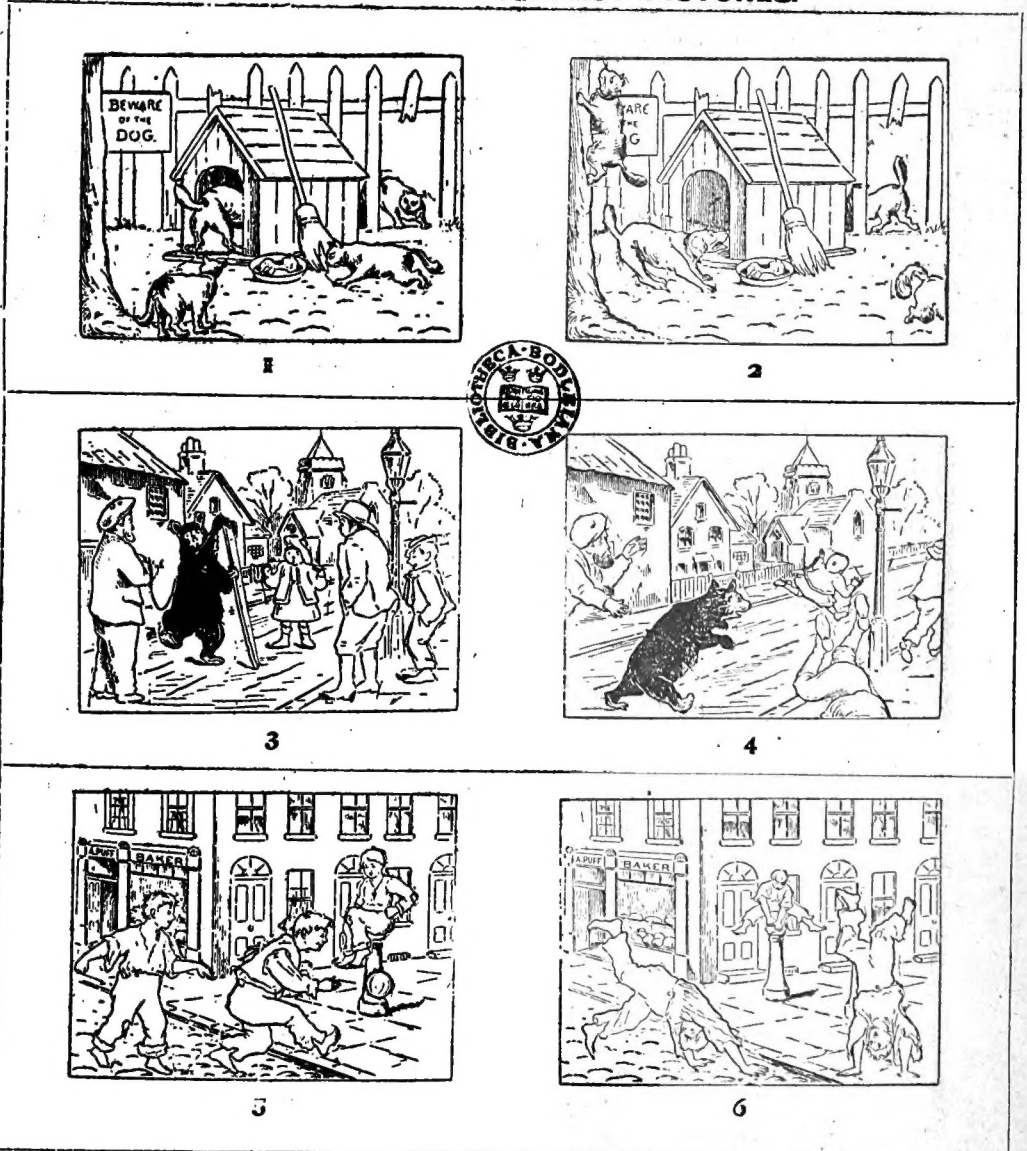

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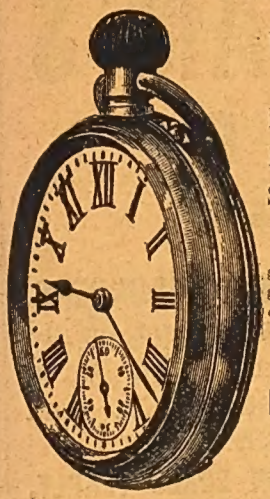

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